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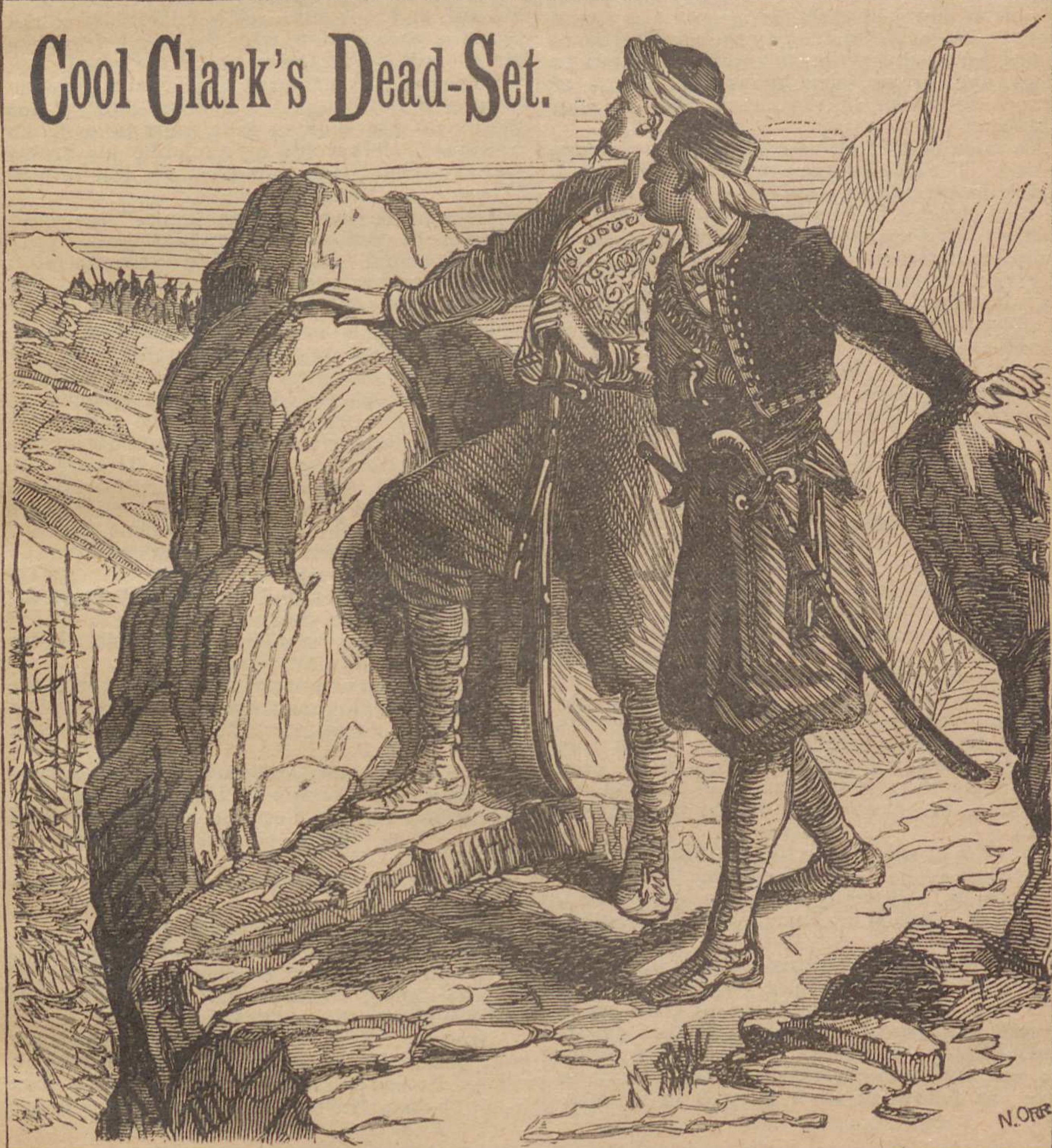
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Cool Clark's Dead-Set.



"LORD BLESS US, YOUNG MASTER, YOU'LL BE TAKEN, SURE!"

Cool Clark's Dead-Set;

OR,

FROM MOSCOW TO SIBERIA.

A Yankee Boy to the Rescue.

BY CHARLES MORRIS,
AUTHOR OF "THE YOUNG NIHILIST," "THE DES-
ERT ROVER," "DICK, THE STOWAWAY,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. LOCKED IN A CITY.

It is the antique city of Moscow, the ancient capital of the great empire of Russia, yet looking as young to-day as if it were not heavy with its weight of centuries. It is the city into which Napoleon marched with his mighty army, and from which he was driven by the mightier force of fire, that reduced the old capital of Russia to ashes, and drove back the proud troops of France to perish in the snows of a Russian winter.

No trace of this grand conflagration remains to-day. The city has risen again from its ashes, and is as proud and wide-spreading as of yore. In fact Moscow has been many times baptized in fire. Historians tell of no less than seven complete destructions by fire, mostly the work of victorious enemies. Yet the old city will not stay destroyed. It has always grown again in a nobler form, and to-day no foe owns a foot of Russian soil.

Such were the thoughts that passed through the mind of Clark Cloverly, as he stood at the window of a house that looked out on the white stone walls and green roofs of Moscow, and noted the glittering cupolas that rose everywhere from the green verdure of the background.

The day was soft and balmy. No trace of the thick ice and deep snows of the Russian winter remained. Summer was upon the land, and the warm sun had covered the whole soil with a wonderful profusion of vegetation.

It was now after the hour of sunset in more southern climes, and yet the sun poured its bright beams across the roofs. For two hours yet it would hold the empire of the skies. As in the midwinter of northern Russia, if one sits long at dinner he will find the sun, which rose as he sat down, going to bed as he gets up, so in midsummer there is hardly any night, and the sun shines the greater part of the twenty-four hours.

But little of this was in the mind of the young American, as he looked impatiently into the street below, and finally left the window with a gesture of vexation and strode hastily across the room.

"I wonder if he's waiting till they make it?" he grumbled. "Or if he's bought a team of colts and is waiting for them to grow up to horses? It's always the way with that sweet-scented Peter. If there's the chap living that can discount him at taking it easy I'd like to have the fellow to show around in a circus.

He'd beat the great pie-biter hollow for drawing."

His grumbling was interrupted by the sound of heavy steps outside, and in a minute after a person entered the room who seemed to be the individual for whom Clark was impatiently waiting. He was evidently a Russian, a tall, lank fellow, with high cheek-bones, and little twinkling eyes, while his hair was of a brick-dust red. There was something so good-natured about the fellow that one could not keep angry with him, yet below it all could be seen an under-current of shrewdness, which showed that Peter was not as simple as he looked.

"You confounded, red-headed sinner, where have you been snoozing?" ejaculated Clark. "You've been gone a good three hours on a half-hour's job. And back again without hoof or axle, I'll bet a monkey."

"Yes," answered Peter stolidly, as he seated himself, and took out a red handkerchief of the size of a table-cloth to wipe the sweat from his brow. "It is just as you say, Mr. Clark."

"The deuce it is?" cried Clark, with a movement as if he thought of shaking him. "But there's no use shaking that mutton-head," he continued. "It would only muddle his brains worse. What have you been at, you ninny? Where is the team?"

"It will be here in two hours," answered Peter, as he continued to mop his brow.

"Two hours! And I ought to be twenty miles from Moscow at this minute! Do you think I want to travel at midnight, you porpoise?"

"Any sensible man would," granted Peter, "instead of traveling in this scorcher."

Clark now shook the stolid fellow in earnest, quite out of patience with his seeming stupidity.

"I must be away, I tell you!" he shouted in his ear. "I am expecting every minute orders from St. Petersburg to stop me. If they nab me back I go! Then I'm bound for Siberia, you jackanapes, and you're working to keep me here till I am snatched by the Government officers."

"Bound for Siberia?" repeated Peter.

"Yes! Sure to go."

"Only keep quiet and you'll go there at the emperor's expense, that's all."

Clark could not help laughing at this. Peter looked so solemn and earnest.

"Guess I don't want to put the emperor to the expense of sending me there as a prisoner. And now let out, old stupid. What have you been at?"

Peter slowly rose and put away his square yard of red handkerchief. He then looked warily around him, and approached Clark with a meaning look. He spoke in a guarded tone on coming near.

"It is too late, Mr. Clark. You cannot carry it out."

"What's the reason I can't?"

"Because, the orders have come. The barriers are guarded. You can not leave Moscow."

"The deuce!" whistled Clark. "What put that bee in your bonnet? It's not true!"

"Isn't it? Then you take a carriage and try your luck. I have a friend in the Government office. He has posted me in the business. You won't be disturbed just now, if you keep quiet.

But you will be arrested if you attempt to leave Moscow."

"I'll be hanged if I won't leave it then!" cried Clark in a rage. "Blast such a country as this, where a chap can't go where he wants, and do what he wants! I tell you I'm going to leave this mossy old town, and that instanter!"

"How?" asked Peter with a stupid look.

"How! I'll tell you how.—I will—" He hesitated, with a look of perplexity, while a queer expression came into Peter's eyes. Peter never laughed, but he seemed to be very near it.

"How will I do it? What are you good for, if you can't tell me?"

Peter again looked around him, went to the door and peeped out, then returned and spoke more cautiously than ever.

"You can not go by carriage."

"Do you suppose I don't see that, dummy?"

"But it will be dark in an hour. You can slip out on foot. I will show you a way. Hush! don't let a word be overheard, or it will go hard with us. You must keep west to the coaching house on the Kasan road. When you reach there hide close in the woods till daybreak."

"That's very neat," answered Clark. "But I don't fancy going to Siberia on foot. And I can't see what good is to come of my playing squirrel in your Russian woods."

"Hush! Walls have ears," and Peter looked about him in alarm. "I'll tell you, Mr. Clark. You can't drive out of Moscow, but I can. Be on the lookout in the woods, and you'll see me before the dew is off the daisies."

"And then hey for Siberia!" cried Clark, without a thought of caution. "Why you're a jewel, Peter! A regular rough diamond! But they know that you're my man. They will suspect."

"I wasn't fool enough to let them know," answered the shrewd Muscovite. "You get ready. Two hours from now. Leave your baggage for me. I will go and see if the track is clear."

Peter left the room. Clark remained alone, looking after him with a pleased expression.

"Hang me, if there isn't more brains in Peter's skull than shows on the outside! The rascal has always proved himself sharp in an emergency, stupid as he looks. By Jupiter, I'm not going to be stopped by the Russian emperor or any of his officers if there's a ghost of a chance. I showed them the grit of a Yankee boy last winter in St. Petersburg. We'll let them see that the Young Nihilist, as they called me, isn't at the end of his rope yet. There's more Yankee tricks in my bag than these thick-brained Muscovites have dreamed of."

He began a busy bustle of preparation. There was a long and perilous journey before him. Some necessary things must be taken, but it would not do to overload himself. He packed some essential things for Peter, and took little on his person except a money-bag, which he belted securely around him beneath his clothes. A formidable-looking document, on parchment, was also secured.

"Lucky I managed to get this," he muttered, with a grim smile. "It's better than a barrel full of gold. A passport for every part of Siberia. Let me once get on the road, and there's

no soul of them can go back on this royal document, with the imperial seal."

He thrust it into a secure inner pocket, which he tightly fastened.

"Lie there, old chap. A money-belt is nothing alongside of you. And now, what next? Don't want much clothes this weather, that's one comfort."

When Peter re-entered, an hour and more afterward, Clark had finished his preparations, and was seated by the window smoking, apparently as easy in his mind as though he were in his father's house in New York, and had nothing more important before him than a walk to the Battery.

"How's the weather, Peter my lovely? All serene, eh?"

"Dark," answered Peter, meaningly, pointing to the window. "It's a black night. That just suits."

"Ay, ay! Is all in train?"

"Look out the window," answered Peter warningly, "down yonder, by the street lamp. Do you see a fellow with a black caftan and a Tartar cap?"

"I just saw such a chap pass. He is in the dark now. Who is he?"

"A police spy. You are watched."

"The hokey I am! That's comfortable! And what's in your pie, Peter?"

"Come with me. We will fool him. I know a thing or two."

"I am glad to hear it," answered Clark sarcastically. "I've been sometimes of the notion that you didn't. But old Sam's never as black as he is painted. Let's get, Peter my lad!"

Peter led the way, followed closely by his young master. He emerged with great caution from a rear door of the house, motioning Clark to keep back.

He disappeared in the darkness. Five minutes elapsed. The Yankee boy was just beginning to grow impatient when Peter reappeared, signaling him to follow.

"Not a word!" warned the cautious Russian. "The coast is clear. Follow."

Clark silently obeyed. A minute or two brought them into a rear street, in which no light shone. They made their way carefully through the gloom.

Peter led on, seeking the darkest byways. Occasionally they were forced to emerge into a lighted street, but they quickly plunged again into some dark alley or passageway. It seemed to the American boy that they had journeyed for several miles in this winding method. He now found that the houses were growing thinner and the trees much denser.

"We are in the suburbs?" he asked.

"Yes. A few minutes more— Hush! By St. Paul, here comes the night patrol! This way, master. Quick!"

Clark hastened after his nimble footsteps. The tramp of the patrol, and the gleam of its lights were now distinctly visible. The two fugitives plunged into a narrow dark alley.

In a minute they reached its lower extremity. It was a blind alley, a *cul-de-sac*, as the French call it. A harsh exclamation came from the young American's lips.

"You booby! This is a sweet trap."

"Hush! They come. A whisper will betray us."

The patrol came on. To the dismay of the fugitives they halted at the mouth of the alley and threw the light of a lantern up its dark length.

"Come," cried the harsh voice of the leader. "It won't do, good fellows! I've got my eye on you. Stir out now, lively."

Clark growled inwardly. Here was a pretty kettle of fish.

CHAPTER II.

TRACKING THROUGH THE DARK.

It was a thrilling moment. The patrolman took a step into the alley, and repeated his demand, in a blustering voice.

"It's all up," said the American boy, to himself with bitter vexation. "The dog's dead before he's had time for a bark. Might as well fling up the sponge decently."

He was on the point of advancing and delivering himself up as a prisoner, but Peter took a strong hold on his coat-tail and pulled him down, into a crouching position.

"Keep quiet, master," he whispered. "Don't sell yourself for a red herring."

Where they were the light of the lantern failed to reach. Only very keen eyes could have distinguished them in the gloom. They waited in nervous silence.

"Stay where you are then, if you like it better," cried the soldier again, while a loud laugh from his lips was echoed by his companions.

A few minutes' chatting and laughing succeeded, during which the fugitives remained in uneasy doubt. Then the order to march was given, and with clanking arms they strode away.

Clark looked questioningly at his companion.

"What does it mean, anyhow? Is that the way they do things in Russia?"

"He didn't see us," answered Peter. "It was only one of his jokes."

"The deuce it was! Then all I've got to say is that it's a stupid style of joking to scare a chap out of six years' growth. Just look at my hair, Peter, and see if it hasn't turned white."

"It looks black," answered Peter in stolid gravity.

"So would a white cat in this darkness. Stir your stumps, my lively. Let's get out of this before any more of your Russian jokers come along. The next one will dive in here like a cat after a mouse. Peg out, Peter, and if you hide me in another blind alley I'll murder you, and make kid gloves out of your hide."

Peter hurried forward at this startling threat, followed closely by his reckless young master. In the locality which they had now gained the street lamps were far apart, and their way led mostly through dense gloom. Keeping a sharp eye open for the patrol they continued their course, through street after street, the houses constantly growing thinner. Peter seemed to be well acquainted with the locality, for he led onward as directly as though it were open daylight.

He stopped at length. They seemed to be in

open country. The few stars in the sky showed only a broad, dark level, lost under a thick curtain of gloom.

"We are out of the town now," remarked Peter, with his habitual caution. "Do you see that white line, off there to the left?"

"I see something like a charcoal mark on a nigger's hide. I wouldn't like to call it white."

"That's the road you're to follow," continued Peter. "Keep it in sight; but make your way through the fields till you are a mile or two out. And when you reach the coaching station, slip around it. Orders may have been sent out."

"Ay, ay!" answered Clark, gayly. "I've a notion we'll show them our mettle, Peter. I'll look for you before the dew is up, my sunflower."

"Don't get out of sorts waiting," returned the cautious Russian. "I may have trouble. But I will come."

"All right. Dive back, and I'll dive on. Good luck and good speed, my hearty. You'll do them, Peter. You have developed a remarkable sharpness. And see here! Don't forget to put some grub in the carriage. I expect to be ready to eat an elephant after my night's walk. You might fetch along a crowbar for a tooth-pick so I can pick my teeth of the bones."

"I will obey," rejoined Peter, as quietly as if he took this for a serious request. "Good-by, master. Don't get scared."

"Scared, you booby! What do you take me for? I wasn't born in a Yankee woods to be scared by a Russian owl. Get away with you now, and be sharp."

Clark moved on with a lively step into the darkness. Peter followed him with his eyes until he disappeared in the gloom. He then shook his head doubtfully, and turned back toward the town. Evidently he was not sure of the success of Clark's enterprise, or in favor of its character.

The young man continued his course, with the active step of youth. To his right was the road which Peter had indicated, a mere line of lighter shadow in the general gloom. Off to the left lay a yet darker line, in which the stars seemed repeated. Clark recognized it at a glance. It was the Moskva, the small river on which Moscow is situated, and from which it gets its name.

"Between river and road I can't easily go astray," he muttered. "I'll get nabbed in the road and drowned in the river, so I fancy the middle track is the safest."

The fields over which he was walking seemed cultivated. Now he found himself in a potato-patch, now in a field of buckwheat, now in a pasture meadow. He could not well tell one from another, however, except from the varying difficulty of progress. Occasionally a farmhouse with outbuildings appeared as a black mass in the general darkness. These he avoided, but not sufficiently to escape the quick senses of some wide-awake curs, that started a lively yelping.

"Wouldn't I like a chance to kick those noisy vagabonds!" he muttered in an angry tone. "I bet high I'd burst their drum-strings. Wonder if I can't take the high-road now and get out of these ugly fields."

He was now a mile or two from the city, and there seemed no further need of excessive caution. He made his way to the roadside and leaped the fence that separated it from the farm lands.

The road was entirely deserted. The sky had now cleared somewhat, and was glittering with stars. It was easy to follow the path which led along the carriageway. Clark advanced at a swinging pace. He was young, fresh and lively. A few miles to him were a mere bagatelle.

The night was well advanced when he arrived within sight of the lights of the coaching-house of which Peter had spoken, about ten miles out from the city.

It was necessary now to be very cautious if he wanted to escape detection. The sharp Yankee youth knew enough of Russian ways to know this. But lest our reader may not have the same knowledge, a short description of certain Russian habits is desirable.

It is the custom, at some posting villages, for the owners of the coach horses to send out night-watchmen along the roads. These lookouts keep on duty all night, even in the winter, being wrapped in thick cloaks to protect them from the cold. Their quick ears catch the bells of the post-chaise, or the sound of wheels and hoofs, when they are yet distant. Word is instantly conveyed to the village, and by the time the carriage arrives horses are ready for its further conveyance.

If the American boy should come across one of these fellows, and if orders had been issued for his arrest, it might not be so comfortable. He turned short from the road and made his way across the fields toward the river, determined to give the village a wide berth.

A half-hour's stumbling over clods and stubble and through harvest field brought him well around the village. The light had now considerably increased. A faint glow appeared on the northeast sky. Dawn was drawing near.

He looked inquiringly around him. A dark mass, which had for some time been dimly visible before him, was now plainly seen to be a piece of woodland. It was not far off, and he hastened toward it. It must be the wood of which Peter had spoken.

Reaching the edge of the timber, the young Yankee plunged into it, breaking through the undergrowth that bordered it. A few steps took him well out of sight into the woodland. He seated himself on the trunk of a fallen tree a short distance beyond the edge of the forest.

"Up to the notch, so far," he said to himself, as he rested after his long and tiresome walk. "That's my share of the job. It's Peter's turn now. If he don't bring the vehicle I've got to up and dig again. I can hire a team somewhere along the turnpike, and I'm not going to peg back to Moscow like a dog with his tail between his legs, while there's a chance left."

The light in the east gradually increased. Day was approaching. A rosy flush covered the sky. It was the first step toward the long summer twilight of the North. He continued lost in deep thought while the minutes slipped slowly by.

"I suppose most people would call me a fool,"

he remarked. "What is this Ivan Stretzlitz to me? they would ask. He saved my life; but that don't go far with folks nowadays. He's been sent to Siberia to work in the Russian mines, and I'm going to run him off if it's in the wood. Maybe I'm only a young fool, but it's my notion of what a chap ought to do, anyway. Tit for tat is good logic. It is a risky adventure, though. There's no humbug with these Russians. If they catch me running off a prisoner my goose is cooked. But I don't care a fig for that. The man that saved my life is in a Siberian mine, and I'll give the job of getting him out a shake, if I go under for it."

His mouth closed with a sharpness that showed he meant business. Clark was full of resolution, and was hard to stop when his mind was made up. His father and sister had tried hard to dissuade him from his project. Yet they were in sympathy with it, and had done nothing to hinder his departure. It was some inkling of his project that had leaked out that caused this present trouble.

It had come to the ears of the Government officers in St. Petersburg that the American youth was off to Siberia with the intention to rescue a prisoner. Orders to prevent his leaving Moscow, or to follow and arrest him if he had left, were at once telegraphed on.

"There's no telegraph line this way," said the adventurer, as he rose and made his way through the forest. "If they catch me it will have to be by hard riding. Can't run me down by lightning."

The wood was more easily traversed in its central portions. It was of oak timber, great knobbed trunks some of which seemed to be centuries old. A few minutes' walk brought him to the roadside. It was here very solitary and lonely. Not a person came in sight, nor a vehicle passed, though he waited for more than an hour.

"Folks have got to sleep into the daylight here," he remarked. "The night is too short for a good snooze. But I wonder what in the blazes keeps Peter? If he lets himself be stopped I'll feel like cropping his ears."

He had to wonder a good while yet. Several hours passed and no Peter appeared. The sun climbed well up into the sky. The country was now wide awake. The lowing of cattle could be heard in the distance. There came the crack of the husbandman's whip, and his cheering cry to his horses. Laborers passed along the road. Now and then a vehicle rattled by. Clark viewed all this from his lurking-place behind a clump of bushes. His impatience grew momentarily. His exertions had made him hungry, too, and he wanted a breakfast lunch as much as he wanted Peter. The passing minutes seemed loaded with lead.

The weary youth imagined all sorts of disasters. He walked impatiently under the shadows of the trees, and kicked toad-stools into the air to vent his spite.

"I'll starve, I know I will, if old slow-and-easy don't hurry up. I'll be like one of the babes in the woods, and have the robins cover me up with leaves. If Peter don't show his mug in an hour more I'll peg out. Haven't got a lifetime to spare waiting on him."

The hour was not half up before the sound of a horse-bell recalled him to his lookout spot. Quickly he came near. The tread of horses was audible. In a few minutes a light carriage, drawn by three horses, shot around a turn in the road. Their driver drew them up to a slow pace, while he looked anxiously to right and left. One glance was enough for Clark. It was the lagging Peter. He sprang briskly out into the road.

"Hi! old jolly-go-easy, here's your fare. On hand at last, eh? I'm wasted to a skeleton waiting. Fork over that lunch instant. I must get my breakfast before I can take a step more."

"Mr. Clark!" cried Peter in a tone of relief. "Jump in quickly! There is not a minute! You can eat on the road!"

"What do you mean?" asked Clark.

"I am pursued, I tell you! I was suspected after I got past the barrier. The officers called me, but I wouldn't stop. They are after me, hot foot. Jump in quick. Every minute counts. They are not far behind."

Clark at this startling news sprang hastily into the carriage, his hunger all forgotten.

"Drive on like blazes!" he cried.

A sharp call from Peter to his horses and away they flew at top pace along the dusty road and under the woodland shadows.

CHAPTER III.

A HOT CHASE ON A STRANGE ROAD.

THE carriage in which Clark found himself was a peculiar one, of a fashion not to be found out of Russia. It hung between four low wheels, the carriage bottom almost touching roadbed. The springs were very stiff, so that traveling was a jolting way of getting along. The traveler was seated on the carriage bottom and could save his bones only by thick cushions, which were used as a seat by day and a bed by night.

This vehicle was drawn by three horses, one in the shafts and one running free on each side. A strong wooden bow was fastened to the ends of the shafts, and curved above the horse's neck. A row of bells were hung to this, which kept up a constant clang as the horses moved.

There were no traces to the shaft horse, but the side horses were yoked with bars and traces. Such was the Russian *kibitka*, a very different affair from our idea of a comfortable post carriage.

Peter sat on a perch in front, dressed gayly in white linen trousers and a bright yellow jacket, strapped around him with a belt.

No sooner was his employer safely within the carriage than he set off at the full speed of the horses, uttering the wild cries of the Russian *yemshick*, or post-boy. "*Padi! Padi!*" (go along) he kept yelling in a shrill voice and in a great variety of tones.

The mettled horses pricked up their ears and tore briskly onward, plunging along the uneven road until the coach bounded like a foot-ball. Clark had to hold on with both hands to keep from being shot upward into the air.

"Are you sure we are pursued?" he asked. "There's a long stretch behind and nothing in sight."

"If we get off safe the officers at Moscow will pay for it," answered Peter. "They know that well. Don't fear but you'll see the color of their jackets."

"All right. Let them come. Ease up your horses a little, Peter. Save their wind for a burst, if we've got to run. And fork over that lunch. I'm as hungry as a wolf."

Peter quietly obeyed. He pulled the horses in to a steady trot, while he handed Clark a small lunch-basket which he had provided, well swollen with its savory contents.

The hungry young man made the best breakfast possible under the circumstances, holding on to the jolting vehicle with one hand while he investigated the depths of the basket with the other. Peter had done his duty nobly, and a brace of huge sandwiches of boiled beef and Russian bread enlivened Clark for the rest of the day.

They were now dragging up a long incline, whose summit was yet some distance ahead. The horses climbed this hill at a slow trot, under the skillful hand of their driver.

"The animals look fresh after their run from Moscow," remarked Clark.

"Not much from Moscow," answered Peter, with a grin. "I got a relay at the coaching-house back there. They are as fresh as bees, and good for a long run."

"Jolly for you!" cried Clark. "There's ten times the wit in your noddle that I fancied, Peter. Here we are at the top of the slope and not a sign of those ghosts of pursuers."

"Look back," replied Peter, in a meaning tone.

Clark did so. The road lay long and straight behind them for more than a mile. At the furthest point to which vision reached a carriage had just appeared, looking at that distance as if drawn by mice instead of horses. It was evidently coming on at a rapid pace. Clark looked at it with inquiring eyes.

"Likely it is only some travelers like ourselves," he remarked.

"It is a Government carriage, and chasing us," answered Peter shortly.

"How do you know that?"

"How does a fox know the difference between chicken and bacon? I haven't been a *yemshick* for twenty years without learning how to use my eyes."

"Then let out. Here's a down-hill piece before us. Shake them out and let them tumble; we can't afford to go to sleep now."

Peter obeyed. His shrill "*Padi*" stirred the mettle of the horses. Down the long slope they started at a swinging gallop, the *kibitka* plunging roughly behind.

The first leap of the animals left their pursuers out of sight, and in a moment they were on a solitary road again, deserted, so far as appeared, by man and beast.

Away they went, with rattling harness and ringing hoofs; the loud cries of Peter, which he kept up in a steady chorus, stirred the horses to their best paces. The hill was, in parts, rather steep, and their plunging speed seemed dangerous; but the bold driver kept it up, exciting the horses to their utmost exertions.

"Good for you, my hearty!" cried Clark.

exhilarated by the wild flight. "They won't catch us at this pace, that's flat. Keep them on the run, Peter; I'll make it worth your while if you fling the officers."

Peter shook his head doubtfully.

"They are lighter than we are," he remarked, "and likely drive better horses. The officers always get the best of everything."

"They won't get the best of me, if I can help it," answered Clark decidedly. "I'm not going back to Moscow while a hair holds. These horses are no slouches. Isn't there any by-road by which we can give them the go-by?"

"No; we must keep straight on."

The pursuing carriage now appeared at the top of the slope which the fugitives had recently left. The latter had gained considerably in their down-hill plunge, but it was evident that the chase was going to be a hot one. In a minute more a curve in the road broke the line of view, and the distant carriage was again lost to sight.

The road was here nearly level. Woodland rose on each side. It was very warm within the shadows of the trees, but the horses rattled on with undiminished speed.

For several miles they continued, without another view of the pursuers.

Then they broke into view as before, on the brow of a hill, outlined against the sky. They had gained considerably. Not more than a half-mile now separated the two carriages. The mice had grown to the size of deer.

Another straight hand-run for several miles more, and again the pursuers broke into view, at a distance of a quarter of a mile. The deer had become dwarf horses. They were growing in size at every step.

"They're running us down," cried Clark. "Our beasts are doing their best, but these chaps drive prime horses. What's to be done, Peter? You've got a sharp brain under your stupid noddle. Put your thinking-cap on, and see what sort of a game you can hammer out."

"There's no game," answered Peter dryly. "They've got the best horses, and the best always wins. That's the end of the game."

"You think so, do you, old stupid? Well, I don't. The best wins, I suppose; but it's the best head, not the best horse. Push on now. If you can't think out any Russian trick, see if I can hit upon a Yankee one."

Clark lay back on the cushions, deeply cogitating. They had now entered another piece of woodland, through which the road wound considerably. Here and there was a straight stretch, and the longest of these again revealed the pursuers, not three hundred yards distant. They yelled and signed for the fugitives to stop, but Peter kept on as stolidly as though he had not heard or seen them.

"They will be on us in twenty minutes more," he remarked, as a turn in the road again cut off the view.

"See here, Peter, do you know that you are alone in this carriage?"

"Alone?" queried Peter in surprise.

"Yes. You drove out of Moscow alone. You passed the post-house alone. I haven't been seen by those fellows behind. Can't you use your arts, and satisfy them that you are

still alone? You are sharp enough to work up some good story."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the astonished driver. "Do you think they won't see you as soon as they come up?"

"No. Nor my baggage neither. Jerk up the beasts, my boy. I am going to take to the woods with my luggage. You can drive on and play dummy."

Peter looked around stupidly, as if the idea took some time to make its way into his brain. Then a knowing look came into his twinkling eyes. He pulled hard on the reins, drawing the horses to a sober pace.

"Jump!" he cried. "There are some bushes."

With a quick swing Clark flung his well-packed valise from the carriage. He then nimbly sprang after it, alighting like a squirrel on his feet.

"Let out," he cried to Peter. "You're light weight now. Show them your heels."

He darted back into the woods as the carriage hastened on, the horses settling down again to their work. A strong swing sent the valise into the midst of a clump of undergrowth, where it was safely hidden from the road.

Clark concealed himself behind the trunk of a huge pine, that was straight and tall enough to make a mast for a three-decker. He wanted to see what was in the wind.

He had not long to wait. Peter and his team disappeared like a flash. In a minute afterward the pursuing vehicle shot swiftly into sight. It was a light carriage, drawn by three horses, like his own. Two uniformed persons occupied it, behind the driver, who was using all the eloquence of a Russian *yemschick* to stir up the zeal of his steeds.

They were all looking straight onward, with eager eyes, and caught no glimpse of the alert face that peered at them around the trunk of the pine.

Clark stepped freely out as they passed him. He was satisfied that they would not look back. In an instant more they shot around the curve, and disappeared.

"Good as gravy," cried Clark in exultation. "They're clean flung this time if Peter is only keen enough to play his share of the game. I must get back into the woods and wait developments."

He extricated his valise from the bushes, and plunged into the depths of the wood.

Ten minutes after Peter drew rein at a post-house, in the center of a roadside village.

"A relay of horses. Quick!" he commanded. "I'm in a hurry."

The attendants sprang to obey. Some commenced to unharness his well-blown animals, while others went for fresh horses. But they had hardly got at this task when the pursuing team rattled briskly up, and was brought to a halt with a strong pull. The officers leaped out and advanced toward the other carriage, on whose seat Peter still sat, as game and stolid as an oyster.

"It won't do, my friend. You've given us a sharp breathing, but you couldn't expect to escape. Surrender now, if you want to save trouble."

The officer advanced to the side of the car-

riage as he spoke. He suddenly ceased, and fell back with a cry of surprise.

"By St. Paul, what does this mean? The *kibitka* is empty."

"He was in it, I'll swear that!" exclaimed the second officer, springing forward.

The villagers looked curiously on at this strange scene. But Peter sat as impassive as ever, only calling out:

"Hurry up those horses. I have no time to wait."

"Shake that stupid dog!" cried the first officer. "Or touch him up with your whip. Hey! fool! Where is the person you had just now in the carriage?"

"Here," said Peter, pointing to himself. "Nobody but me. I'm off to Bogorodsk for Count Demetri. Hope I'll have your company. The road is confounded lonely."

"The fellow is either a knave or a fool," exclaimed the angry officer. "Search him and the carriage. There is some trick behind all this."

CHAPTER IV.

WOLVES IN SHEEPS' CLOTHING.

THREE weeks had elapsed from the date of the closing of our last chapter. On the banks of a narrow stream in the heart of Northern Russia sat two men, actively engaged in eating cherries, of which they had a full basket beside them. They were dressed in peasant costume, while at their side lay a kit of carpenter's tools, indicating that they were peasant carpenters on their travels.

At the risk of tiring our readers a little, it may be well to give some idea about the way they manage these things in Russia. Affairs in that country are conducted so differently from our idea of business, that it is hard even to understand their customs. Russians do not own farms as we do. Each village owns a tract of land in common. This is divided up into family lots, and each family has to do its share of work. Some of the villagers learn trades, and travel all over the country looking for work. But they have to send part of their earnings to the village, and to come back when ordered, or else to become outcasts from their native homes.

Such seemed the two men who sat eating cherries on the banks of the Kliasma, near the small town of Vladimir, 150 miles from Moscow. They were chatting busily as they made way with the sweet fruit. One of them laughed as if greatly amused, but the other sat without a smile on his long, lean face.

"If we haven't pulled wool over the eyes of your Russian police, there's no use talking," remarked the first, whose youthful face, though brown and sunburnt, bore a striking resemblance to that of Clark Cloverly.

"We will be caught yet," answered the other. "The whole country is awake. Orders are far ahead of us."

"All right, friend Peter," replied the youth, with a reckless laugh. "We've played carpenter among them for three weeks now, and haven't sawed a board yet. It's a cute game, I take it. They will never think of looking

under a carpenter's coat for a Yankee scapegrace."

"Suppose you are asked to do some work," suggested Peter. "What's to be done then?"

"The work's to be done."

"But I never handled a saw in my life."

"Nor I, either. You leave that to me. Yankees know how to use tools before they are born. They don't have to learn."

He got up and threw the kit of tools across his shoulder.

"Come, old slowboy! We must toddle on. Every mile counts."

Peter rose with a sigh. He was not so spry on foot as his young companion. Their course lay along the banks of the river, which wound prettily through a cultivated country.

These two travelers were, as their conversation must have shown, the pair of fugitives whom we left in a difficult situation some three weeks before. It is necessary, while they journey along the banks of the Kliasma, to go back and explain how they came into this situation.

We left Clark in the depths of a thick piece of timber, dragging along a heavy sachel, which was no pleasant task in the heat of midsummer. He at length dropped it in disgust and seated himself upon it, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

"This kind of traveling may be good for salamanders, but I don't hanker after it," he ejaculated. "I hope Peter will fling his friends and pick me up soon, but I'm sore afraid that cat won't jump. I haven't too much faith in Peter's smartness, though he certainly isn't as great a fool as he looks."

The hours passed by slowly as he continued to wait. A considerable time had elapsed when his impatience would not let him rest longer in suspense. He rose and made his way through the woods, intending to reconnoiter the posting village.

On gaining the edge of the woodland, however, the clang of bells warned him to retire. Some vehicle was approaching. In a few minutes this came in sight. Clark's heart leaped with satisfaction on observing it. It was his own carriage, with Peter on the perch, gazing eagerly and anxiously to right and left as he drove slowly through the woods.

The eyes of the honest fellow lighted up with satisfaction on seeing his young master spring alertly from his hiding-place with a cheery cry of greeting.

"Hey, Peter! Hey, jolly boy! You're a mountain daisy through and through. So you've flung the cops, my hearty?"

"Is it you, Mr. Clark?" warned Peter. "They'll hear you if you make so much clatter. They searched the carriage, but there was nothing in it, and I said I was driving to Bogorodsk after Count Demetri. They didn't half believe it, but there was no use in arresting an empty carriage, so they let me off. I drove back here by a by-road around the village. Jump in, Mr. Clark. We must go back the same way."

An hour's circuit brought them again into the high-road beyond the posting station. Their journey continued in safety for several days. But Peter discovered, by the conversation of

the villagers at the points where they passed the nights, that the pursuit was by no means given up. A description of the fugitive had been sent far and wide, and Clark was recognized at more than one station as the escaped American.

"Why do they not arrest me then?" he asked Peter in doubt.

"Because that is not the Russian way. Orders have been sent on to Vladimir, a hundred *versts** ahead of us. We will be arrested there and sent back to Moscow."

"How do you know this? Do the Russian police spread their plans in that fashion?"

"I have some friends among the local officers," answered Peter with a knowing wink. "I got a hint last night, and he is a fool that won't take a hint. Vladimir's the place."

"Then through Vladimir we'll go, by hook or crook."

"How, sir?" exclaimed Peter in dismay. "That will be straight into the wolf's jaws."

"The wolf won't bite," answered Clark, quietly.

There was a plan in his mind, which he worked up into shape during the next few stages. It was very evident that their carriage travel must come to an end. Siberia was not to be reached by post.

Several weeks afterward two travel-stained peasants tramped into Vladimir, their carpenter's tools proclaiming their profession. The fugitive travelers had assumed this disguise, which had enabled them to wander safely through many broad miles of Russian lands. Clark spoke Russian with very little accent, so that he was taken for a native of the south.

It was pure bravado which took Clark here, as the place could easily have been avoided. He was just the one to dare the wolf's jaws, as Peter had called it.

He was even reckless enough to interview the authorities of the old city, representing that they were from Pogrof, a village in the south, and were seeking work in the north.

Much to their private satisfaction, no work offered at Vladimir. Purchasing some lunch and a basket of cherries, for which fruit this place is famous, they proceeded on their journey. Clark laughed gayly as they left the streets of the town, and prepared to dine on the banks of the small but swift stream that flowed past.

"There's nothing like it, Peter," he declared. "The only way to get along swimmingly is to march straight up to the rack. If we'd tried the slip-around game it would have been all up with us. Face the music, that's my motto."

Peter shook his head doubtfully.

"Don't you buy Russians for fools, Mr. Clark, or you'll maybe find yourself sold."

"They were neatly fooled that time, anyhow," cried Clark gayly.

This meal ended, they proceeded, as we have said at the opening of this chapter, along the banks of the Kliasma, the small stream that ran by the city. Clark was gay and hopeful, but we cannot say the same thing for Peter, who

frequently looked back with an anxious expression.

"Here comes a party of men after us," he at length said.

"Very well," answered the boy easily. "This is a public highway."

"But—"

"Oh, drop your buts. There's no use butting against every corner."

The men came up at a rapid pace. There were four of them, stout fellows, dressed in the attire of *moujiks*, or laborers.

"Stop!" cried the foremost of them to the travelers. "You are carpenters?"

"That's what we carry our kit of tools for," answered the lad.

"Then you are wanted in Vladimir. The Governor, Baron Orloff, needs some work done, and sent us after you."

"Messengers must be plenty in your town," rejoined Clark, sarcastically, as he eyed the four men. "If carpenters are as plenty he can get his job done without us. Tell him that for us. We are bound for Barakova."

"He wants your work. Southern carpenters are famous for their skill."

"He will not get us, then," cried Peter, sharply. "We asked for work in the town, and there was none. We will not turn back for ten Governors."

"This is my sentiment," added his comrade.

"But you must. The order is imperative."

"We are free Russians. We will not."

The Moujik made a sign to his companions, who stationed themselves across the road.

"There is no use, my good fellows," he remarked. "When Count Orloff gives an order nobody questions it. Will you walk or be carried back?"

The Yankee boy looked at the stalwart party. He then cast a questioning glance at Peter, whose face remained impassive.

"So those are your orders, eh? To fetch us whether we will or no?"

"Something like it," answered the *moujik*, with a meaning grin.

"Lead on, then. You can lead a horse to the trough, but you can't make him drink, let me tell you that."

A half hour afterward they were ushered into the presence of Count Orloff, Governor of Vladimir, a stout, hard-featured, haughty personage.

"These are the carpenters your excellency sent for," remarked the *moujik*.

The count fixed his eyes sternly on them, with a trace of suspicion in his looks. Peter looked down to the floor, as if unable to bear that gaze, but the boy met the fierce eyes of the count with a look that would not have flinched before an emperor.

"You are carpenters from the South, my good fellows? That is well. I have some jobs to be done. You are looking for work I am told."

"We were, your excellency," answered Peter. "But we did not find any."

"You have found some now. This desk is out of repair. I wish it mended. Do that well and I will find you some other jobs."

* A verst is about two-thirds of a mile.

Clark looked at it doubtfully.

"That is cabinet work," he replied. "We are only carpenters, and rough hands at that."

"You don't want to do my work," the count harshly answered, while his eyes were fixed threateningly upon the speaker. "Perhaps you do not know who you are dealing with, fellow? Here is another job. I want a lock put upon this door. Here is the lock. Any fool can do that. I shall leave you to finish the work. If it is not done inside of three hours, you may find that I am not to be trifled with."

He left the room, with a look of significant meaning. The two mock carpenters remained alone. They looked at one another dubiously.

"This is fun," remarked the young man, with a sour grimace.

"It's worse than that. It is earnest," replied Peter. "I'm desperately afraid the cat is out of the bag, master."

CHAPTER V.

A GOOD JOB OF WORK.

AN hour of the time given to finish the job had passed by. The two companions remained mute and nonplused. Peter sat on the box of tools, with his eyes fixed on the floor, stolidly waiting. Clark had perched himself on the broken desk, had lighted a cigar, and was smoking as contentedly as if he had not a care in the world.

"How goes it, Peter?" he asked, with a contemptuous glance at his companion. "You look as if you had just buried your grandmother. Come, old stupid, waken up. Use your wits and show how we're to get out of this scrape."

"We'll get out of it by getting in the lock-up," answered Peter gloomily. "Count Orloff is a terrible man when he gets angry."

"There's one way to get off."

"How?"

"By doing the job."

"It can't be done, master."

"I've done harder things than that," answered Clark. "I'd be ashamed to call myself a Yankee and back down before a bit of wood-butcher."

"I know no more about the tools than a baby," grumbled Peter.

"No more do I. But I've had my smoke out and got my brains in shape. Let's see what ails the old desk, anyway."

He sprang from his perch and began a close inspection of the desk.

It was a neatly-made piece of mahogany furniture, with many drawers and pigeon-holes, altogether a complex affair. It had apparently been badly treated, for it seemed considerably shattered. There was a loose cover, broken hinges, split joints, and several gaping cracks in the wood.

Clark examined it critically, taking out the drawers, and inspecting every part of the broken desk.

"Wonder if they've been playing foot-ball with it?" he asked. "Looks as if a train of cars had run over it. But you can bet your jolly picture, Peter, that I'm not going to back down. Hand me that box of screws and a

gimlet. We'll fetch these cracks to order, or something shall burst."

With Peter's aid he was soon diligently at work, putting a screw here and there, driving in brads, fastening the loose hinges, and otherwise bringing the thing into shape. The work was rough, but effectual. Clark had the eye of a natural mechanic, and saw at a glance the best way to manage the difficulty.

"So far, good. Give me that hammer, Peter. You're splitting the wood with your clumsy fingers. This is the way to drive a nail."

He had even less success than Peter, for the awkwardly driven brad opened a split across the whole front of the drawer which he was seeking to repair. He dropped the hammer with a whistle of chagrin.

"What the blazes is to be done now?"

"Put the lock on the door, and shut out Count Orloff," suggested Peter.

The Yankee boy sat cogitating for a few minutes, while he leaned upon his hammer.

"I'm desperately afraid he suspects us to be something more than carpenters. What do you think, Peter? I didn't like his way of eying us."

"No more did I," answered Peter.

"And he won't think any better of it when he sees his desk, for it's a regular quarryman's job. Do you know, my lovely coon, your count has got a game in all this?"

"I am afraid so."

"I'll tell you what it is, Peter, a Yankee mayn't be born a carpenter; but he's all there when it comes to a game of wits. You bet I see right through the count's little scheme, and I'm going to play him a trick worth two of his."

"How?"

"Just watch me out, and you'll see. Deeds, not words, that's my motto."

Clark set himself at once to the job of lock-smithing, as ordered by the count, but he did it in a fashion that made Peter open his eyes. The strong, stout lock that had been given them was soon strongly attached to the door with long screws. The catch for the bolt was next fixed to the door-jamb, and the amateur carpenter looked at his work with satisfaction.

"Not bad, for a wood-butcher," he complacently remarked.

Peter nodded knowingly.

"I don't know where you learned to do it, Mr. Clark."

"Keep mum, Peter. I'm going to astonish our noble count, you bet."

As he spoke he was going through some peculiar manipulations. He removed the money-belt from his body, and thrust it, together with his passport and some other questionable objects, into a secret drawer which he had discovered in the desk.

"Come, Peter, shell out. Have you got anything about you that will sell us—any letter or scrap of writing?"

"Not a scrap," answered Peter.

Steps sounded without at this minute. Clark had hardly time to shove the drawer back to its place before the door of the room opened, and Count Orloff entered, followed by several attendants. He looked around him with a crit-

ical eye. There was a meaning glitter in his gaze when he saw that the lock had been placed on the door as ordered.

"So you have thought it best to obey," he coldly remarked, as he walked over to the desk, of which he commenced a close inspection.

He looked it over for a moment, and then turned to the amateur carpenters, who were quietly waiting his verdict. There was a look of cold sarcasm on his face.

"Very neat, on my faith," he remarked. "A fair show of Pogrof work. So, my good fellows, you expect that job to pass muster, eh?"

"Just so," answered Clark, boldly. "We told you we were no cabinet workers. You insisted on having carpenter work done on your desk and you've got it."

"Apprentice work, I fancy. It won't answer, my man. I have tested you, and I see you are mere frauds, as I suspected. Where did you get those tools?"

"Brought them with us from Pogrof."

"Let me see them." He critically examined the box of tools. "Just as I thought. They are of northern make—bought in Moscow. Shrewd foxes you are, but I am a little of a fox-hound. You have played it well, my men, but you are trying your game on an old hand. I know you, sirrah. You are at the end of your rope."

"And all this because I bought a chisel in Moscow!" exclaimed Clark, with an air of injury. "I don't understand your excellency. We're only poor wandering carpenters, and have done nothing against the law."

The Governor fixed his keen eyes on the face of the speaker, while a look of superior sagacity marked his sharp features. He turned with an imperious gesture to his attendants.

"Search them," he briefly commanded.

Clark showed signs of resistance, and questioned the authority of the count to put them to this indignity without a legal warrant. But the proud noble sat with a sarcastic smile upon his face. This reluctance to be searched seemed to him evidence of guilt. He did not suspect that his prisoner was only posing for effect.

The attendants proceeded quietly to obey orders, despite Clark's indignant protests. Peter took the cue, and also protested. But it was of no avail. They were thoroughly searched.

Yet Count Orloff's smile became less sarcastic as he looked at the objects that had been taken from his prisoners. There was nothing to which a shadow of suspicion could be attached.

"Examine their clothes more closely. There must be papers sewn into them," he commanded.

The search was resumed, but it proved as useless as before. There was a covert smile on Clark's face, as he continued his protests against what he called an illegal outrage. He threatened to bring it before the village tribunal.

The discomfited Governor looked at his seemingly indignant prisoner with an air of doubt.

"Search the room," he exclaimed with a flash of hope. "Examine the desk. They have concealed their effects."

This search was also without result. The

searchers were not aware of the secret drawer of the desk, which Clark had discovered by accident.

"There is nothing to be found, your excellency," announced the principal officer.

The count's brows contracted. A look of stern suspicion came into his eyes, as he fixed them on the unflinching face of the younger captive.

"You brave it out well," he said harshly. "But I know you. You are not from Pogrof but from Petersburg. You are the young American whom I have orders to stop and send back. I have your description."

"American?" answered Clark, with well assumed wonder.

"Just so. I have sent to Moscow for an officer to identify you. You are sharp, young fellow, but you will find that a Russian is no fool. Do you know why I had you put a lock on this door?"

"How should I know that?"

"It was only that you might make your own prison," replied the count with a grating laugh. "You have forged fetters for your own limbs, my keen lad. Here is the lock which you have kindly put on the door. I will station a guard at the window, lest you take a fancy to get out that way. To-morrow morning the officer from Moscow will be here. I hope meanwhile you may have pleasant dreams."

A sarcastic smile marked his face as he ordered his attendants to remove the carpenters' tools from the room.

"I don't care to leave you the means to take the lock off again," he ironically said. "You can have the full benefit of your good work. Good-night, and think twice before you next try to trick a Russian."

Clark looked very downcast as they left the room, while Peter seemed as if he had not a friend left in the world. A laugh at their woe-befallen countenances came from the party of Russians as they closed the door firmly behind them and turned the key with a sharp click in the lock.

The door was no sooner closed, however, than a cunning smile came upon Clark's face, which was reflected on that of Peter.

"Keen; ain't they, my boy?" remarked the youth.

"Sharp as razors," answered Peter, with an open grin.

"But maybe they'll find that I'm a little sharper than a clam-shell myself."

"Shouldn't wonder," answered Peter, with a look of admiration.

"If I don't show Count Orloff the length, breadth and thickness of a Yankee trick before he is ten hours older, then you can sell me for a goose. Humbugged into locking myself in, was I? You'll find that he laughs best who laughs last, my dear count. And now, Peter, I guess I'll resume my valuables. That part of the fun is settled."

He quickly opened the drawer in the desk which the searchers had failed to discover, and regained his concealed treasures. He next stretched himself on the floor, advising Peter to do likewise.

"We might as well snooze out the balance of

the day," he remarked, "for we won't get much sleep to-night."

This was a welcome invitation to Peter, who was always ready for a sleep. When they woke again the day was long passed. The gloom of night clouded their window, and darkened the room. All was in dead silence. Clark looked out the window. It was as the Governor had threatened. A sentinel paced sturdily back and forth without.

"What time do you fancy it to be, Peter?"

"An hour past midnight, by the stars."

"Then slide's the word, and farewell to our sharp count."

He grasped the latch of the door and pulled with all his force. It held firm for a moment, and then suddenly yielded. The catch that held the bolt had been purposely put on with short screws, that scarcely entered the wood. It gave way before Clark's hard pull, and dropped into Peter's outstretched hands.

The door stood open. Not a sound had been made.

Clark held up his hand in warning. They listened intently. All was in deep silence.

"Come," he whispered.

In a moment they were in the passage outside, and the door closed behind them. It was very dark here, but they remembered the course they had taken on their entrance to the mansion.

Cautiously feeling their way with one hand on the wall, they were not long ere they met a solid obstacle to their course.

"It is the door," whispered Clark.

It proved to be unlocked. He opened it carefully. A breath of the night air struck their faces. The stars were visible before them. A step forward, and they were free in the open air.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRDS OUT OF THE CAGE.

THE night was moonless. The stars, however, shone brightly, and it was quite light enough to see the surroundings without difficulty. All lay in utter quiet around. The city of Vladimir seemed to be buried in deep slumbers.

Clark led the way carefully to a dark corner in an angle of the house, and halted there. Peter was for making his way with all rapidity from the dangerous locality, but he was caught by the collar by his companion, and drawn back.

"Don't buck away like a crazy donkey," whispered the latter angrily, "or you'll be ramming your brains against a stone wall. Hold hard, and let us get the lay of the land. He's a blind fool that runs without looking."

Forcing Peter into the dark alcove, Clark used his eyes and ears intently to get a full idea of the situation before moving. All was still. Only the occasional yelp of a distant hound broke the silence. Not a light was visible. The town seemed lost in its deepest slumber.

The mansion of the Governor stood somewhat back from the street. It was a large house, with many angles and porches. The shadows of some large trees added to the gloom

surrounding it. To the left stood the stables, a clump of frame buildings.

Clark observed all this with a keen and attentive eye, while some shrewd thoughts passed through his busy brain.

"See here, Peter," he remarked in a whispered tone, "there's going to be a wild time around this shanty to-morrow morning."

"That's very likely," answered Peter.

"And there'll be a jolly hunt after two young gentlemen of our size."

"I calculate there will."

"All right so far. But I don't fancy playing fox to these Russian hounds. That's one thing. Another thing is that I owe your smart Count Orloff a trick."

"Don't do it!" cried Peter, in alarm lest his reckless companion might lead the way into danger. "We've got a free foot. Let's keep it."

"We'd play hob afoot, wouldn't we?" said Clark, contemptuously. "Why they'd search the whole country and run us down before ten o'clock to morrow morning."

"But we haven't wings. We can't fly," protested Peter.

"See here, old stupid," said Clark, in a sarcastic tone. "You know the make up of a Russian house. I judge you could find the grub-closet in this establishment."

"The grub-closet?" queried Peter.

"Yes. The pantry. The provision-chest. We'll want a lunch at breakfast-time, and I fancy Count Orloff don't expect us to walk off hungry. If he does that Russian nobleman is going to be disappointed. Dive back, my lad, and stir up some grub."

"What? In there?" cried Peter in alarm.

"Just so. Back into the lion's den."

"But I couldn't do it. I am not brave enough. It would be a terrible risk."

"Very well," answered Clark coolly, as he seated himself on a projecting stone. "I am not going to starve to please you. If you won't go on a grub-raid I'll sit here till morning, and ask the folks for my breakfast when the house opens."

"You don't mean it!" exclaimed Peter, holding up his hands in dismay.

"Don't I? Just you try me, then. You'll find out what sort of a hair-pin I am, my jolly rooster."

"But to go back there!—and after getting out safely!"

"You'll go back, or stay here, for I won't budge an inch."

Peter looked as if he had swallowed a gallon of new pickles. After several minutes' hesitation, he rose, and cautiously moved back along the side of the house. Clark watched his scared and unwilling messenger with a smile of amusement.

"Thought I'd fetch him. Peter don't hanker after the job. But I ain't going away hungry to please him."

Trembling, and starting at the rustle of every leaf, the unwilling groom forced himself to return to the giant's castle, which he had hoped never to set foot in again. But he dreaded the reckless spirit of his young master even more than he did the stern Governor. Every step

back was like pulling a tooth; but he did not dare to refuse.

He was sharp enough, however, to remove his boots, and enter the house in stocking feet. The fall of an autumn leaf would have made less noise than did his footsteps as he moved back on his perilous path. Clark was right in one thing. Peter knew just where to find the pantry. Russian houses are built much on one pattern. He had the whole affair mapped out in his mind, and felt his way through the darkness almost as directly as if he had had full daylight.

Fifteen minutes elapsed. All within continued deathly still. At the end of that period the nervous messenger again glided like a dusky ghost through the front door of the house, and gave a sigh of relief as he felt the breath of the night air on his face.

"I wouldn't go through that again if the emperor would make me Governor of Moscow," he said to himself. "Such a sweat as I've been in! But I've got the provender, and I hope that will satisfy that wild boy."

He adjusted the parcel of provisions which he had thrown over his shoulder, and made his way to the spot where he had left Clark. To his surprise and dismay, the alcove was empty. His youthful employer had disappeared.

"Whatever has become of the scapegrace?" ejaculated Peter. "Mercy on me, but I'm afraid of some more of his untamest tricks."

Peter dubiously continued his journey. It was darker than before. Clouds had gathered, and the stars were veiled upon the sky. He went on around the side of the house, with cautious steps and anxious eyes.

"Saint Peter preserve us all! The young fool is up to some risky wildness, I know," groaned Peter.

"Not such a fool as you take him for," came a voice in the nervous fellow's ear, that made him start as if he had been shot. "Got the grub, Peter? Why you're a jewel, my jolly. Give us your coat collar, and keep as quiet as a blue bird. Come this way."

A hand grasped his collar and led him diagonally across the yard. He yielded submissively. There was evidently something in the wind, but what it was he could not imagine.

In a few moments they entered a carriage track leading outward from the stables. A few steps more took them outside the open gate, and into the street. There, before Peter's astonished eyes, stood a light open carriage, harnessed with three horses, in Russian fashion.

He gazed at Clark in dismay.

"Lord bless us all, you haven't been helping yourself to the count's carriage?"

"It looks that way. I'd have put bells on the horses, but I didn't like to disturb the folks."

"But do you know what that means?" cried Peter in terror. "It's flat burglary! They'll send us to Siberia if we're caught!"

"They'd do that anyhow. But they've got to catch us first," rejoined the reckless youth. "I'll send the count his horses, with my compliments, when I am done with them. But I owe that gentleman one. And I don't intend to tramp afoot while he's got horses to spare. He's got

to catch the fox before he can take the brush. Tumble in, old blunderbuss."

Clark took the reins. In Peter's present state of mind he was not safe to trust with them. In a minute more the horses were moving at a walk down the street of Vladimir.

At this critical instant a dog, which had slept during all the previous movements, suddenly awakened, and set up a prodigious clamor in the yard they had just left.

Peter, in alarm, made a clutch for the reins.

"Hurry!" he exclaimed. "It's all up! That cur will rouse the town!"

He got for his pains a smart stroke of the reins across his knuckles.

"I'm driving this team," said Clark, in a low stern voice. "Just you subside and try and get back your brains, for you seem to have lost them."

He continued to keep the horses at a walk, despite the continued barking of the dog. One side of the street lay in deeper shadow than the other, and he closely hugged this side. They moved noiselessly over the dusty surface of the road.

"Make haste slowly. That's my motto," said Clark. "Never run till you have to run, and then go as if the old boy was kicking you. Do you see now? The dog's shut his horn, and everybody's asleep yet. If I got flustered like you I'd throw up the sponge at once."

Peter had nothing more to say. It was evident that there was a cool hand at the reins. Clark kept the horses at a walk until he had passed beyond the built-up town. Only a few scattered houses remained.

"Now, my lad, it's neck or nothing," he remarked to Peter, in a tone of satisfaction. "There's a clear path and no favors. We ought to be fifteen miles away by daybreak. Do you know this road?"

"I've been over it twenty times."

"Then take the reins. I can't get speed out of a horse without the whip. But you Russians never use one. It's all tongue with you and no whip. Drive like blazes, Peter, for they'll chase us hard in the morning. And lawsee, won't old Orloff be boiling! I'd give my hat to be by and see him."

He laughed gayly as he changed seats with Peter. There was no longer need of caution, as there was no house near. The horses started off at a quick trot on feeling a loosened rein. They were full of spirit, and Clark had held them in with difficulty.

It was a straight clean road, and though the darkness continued, their course was clearly marked out by the hedges and fences on each side. In Peter's skillful hands the horses made a good pace. The houses once passed he used all the arts of a Russian *yemschick* to stir them on. It is the custom of those drivers to keep up constant cries, at the highest pitch of their voices. *Padi*, "go along," is the ordinary call, but they also talk to the horses in a patronizing tone. "Come good woman!" "Stir up, my little doves!" "Wake up, old fellow!" and a variety of such sayings serve the purpose of a whip, which is never used.

The fresh horses rattled gayly along. The young American was right in his conjecture.

They were fully fifteen miles on their road when the sun sent his first rays above the eastern horizon.

"So far good," he said, with satisfaction. "Russians don't rise very early after these short summer nights. We ought to have another hour good before they miss the birds out of their cage. Keep the creatures down to their work, Peter."

The American boy amused himself in investigating the contents of the lunch package, and they made between them a hearty meal out of the abundant stock of provisions to which Peter had helped himself.

"Jolly, my lad," exclaimed the Yankee; "you've got a good eye for grub in the dark. That cold meat is mine, and the bread is sweet as pound-cake. I knew I could trust you on the grub question."

About eight o'clock that morning they drove into a post station, about thirty miles from Vladimir. The horses were well blown with their sharp run.

"Quick!" cried Clark. "A relay. Stir ourselves, my men. We are in haste."

"Ay, ay!" answered the postal-master. "But I'm afraid the horses are all in the fields. You've driven hard this morning. 'Mercy on me, isn't that Count Orloff's turnout?'"

Peter shook in his boots at this suggestion. But Clark was quite up to his duty.

"Yes," he quietly answered. "We are on the count's business. And in a deuce of a hurry too. You'll be apt to hear from the count if you delay us. Wake up there, my men, or you'll get wool in your ears."

This threat of the displeasure of the autocrat count roused up the postmen to their best endeavors. Within ten minutes they had a team of horses ready and harnessed to another carriage, as Clark desired to leave the count's vehicle.

"Good-by now. Public business, you know. Give my respects to Count Orloff if he comes this way."

They were off again at racing speed.

Three hours afterward the humbugged Governor of Vladimir rode into the station in wild haste. But his anger became fury on receiving the message left for him, and being offered his own carriage and horses to prosecute his journey.

The very air became blue with his rage, and if ever a set of men were thoroughly cursed they were the astonished inmates of the posting-station.

Finally the raging nobleman flung himself again into his carriage and drove violently on, vowing the most dire vengeance on the fugitives should they fall into his hands.

CHAPTER VII.

THE GREATEST FAIR ON EARTH.

It was night of the day succeeding that of the escape from Count Orloff's improvised prison. The fugitives had driven night and day, with frequent relays of horses, taking turns to sleep in the carriage. Near nightfall of the second day they entered the important city of Nijni Novgorod, on the banks of the river Volga,

more than one hundred and fifty miles from Vladimir. They had made good use of their time.

"That's what I call going," cried Clark, as he sprung lightly from the carriage. "I bet high we've left the count fifty miles behind. And now, my lad, for a supper and a quiet snooze."

"You don't know Count Orloff," answered Peter, in alarm. "He is a regular sleuth-hound. He will never leave the track. We had best keep on."

"What for?" asked Clark, with a contemptuous gesture. "He could find a needle in a haystack as quickly as find us here. Don't you know where you are, booby?"

"In Nijni Novgorod," replied Peter.

"And to-day is August 10th. The great fair is in full swing, you ninny. There's more than half a million people in this town, if there's a soul. It will be odd if we can't hide in such a crowd."

Peter's face brightened up. He had not thought of the fair. He had, in fact, completely lost his head during the past two days, and, but for the cool wit of his young employer, would have run square into danger.

"But the town will be searched. We will be described to the police."

"I fancy not. The fair is in full swing. We can disguise ourselves here in any rig from John Chinaman to John Bull. But let us look after sleep and supper first, for I suppose the town is jammed with strangers."

While the travelers seek the hotel on the handsome main avenue of the city, a short description of the place and its peculiar industry may not be amiss. Nijni or New Novgorod is an ancient Russian city situated at the point where the river Oka joins the greater stream of the Volga. It has long been celebrated as the seat of a grand annual fair, which is without its equal upon the earth, and brings together a greater variety of the human race than can anywhere else be found in one spot, merchants from far off China on the East mingling with traders from far off England on the West, while all the intermediate inhabitants of Russia and Asia are there represented in their national habits and dress, and with their national goods for sale. It is the great meeting-place of the East and West, and millions of dollars' worth of goods change hands during the period of the fair. This fair has continued for centuries, at first in the Tartar city of Kasan, but latterly in Novgorod, and is one of the greatest events of Russian life.

Into such a scene had the travelers fallen. Yet on leaving their hotel the next morning, after a night's refreshing slumber, they found the streets, which had swarmed with people the preceding night, now silent and deserted. All the inhabitants of the city seemed to have suddenly vanished.

The young American was for the moment a little puzzled at this. Had everybody taken wings and flown away from the city? Ere he could make up his mind on this point he was roused by Peter, who nervously grasped his arm and drew him hastily into the shadows of a narrow alley.

"There he comes! Quick! I am afraid he saw us!"

"Who?"

"The count! The great Orloff. Yonder!"

The sound of hoofs was audible, rapidly drawing near. The next minute a carriage appeared, drawn by three smoking horses, and displaying behind the driver the hard, stern face of the Governor of Vladimir, his countenance full of fierce determination.

"Lord, ain't he boiling over. There'll be the very Old Nick to pay, and no pitch hot, if he gets a twinkle at us. The fun is getting warm, Peter. Put your wits to play and say how we're to fling him."

"Let us go to the fair," suggested Peter. "That's where you said we could hide."

"The fair? Where is it? Lead the way. So that's what has swallowed up the town."

A few minutes' sharp walk brought them to the locality of the great fair, on the lower ground at the junction of the two rivers.

The deathlike stillness of the upper town suddenly ended. They found themselves at once in the midst of a dense crowd, who surrounded a series of wooden shops adjoining the stream. The further they went the thicker became the crowd. The multitude of people was in steady motion. The travelers followed, not knowing where they were being led. At length a turn to the right disclosed a low bridge of boats, leading across the Oka, and crowded with the long line of moving people.

At once the great fair broke upon their vision. Before their eyes was spread out a great mass of low stone buildings with a lofty edifice in their center, and a vast spread of wooden booths occupying the outer space. Among these was such a multitude of people as Clark had never before seen together in one place. It seemed, at first sight, as if the inhabitants of twenty ant-hills had been suddenly converted into men, and heaped together in a maze of human beings.

Clark pushed his way across the bridge, filled with curiosity. He was closely followed by Peter. Very soon they were among the booths, which they found to be crowded with goods in astonishing variety, while the busy throng of buyers and sellers kept up a babble of talk in almost every known language of the civilized world.

It seemed as if the whole of the human race had been flung together in that one spot of the far North. In addition to the Russians, and people from every nation of Europe, there were the Armenians of Southern Asia, with fair skins, handsome faces and fine forms. Beside them were the people of Bokhara, in Central Asia, short and bloated, with shaved heads and skin of a mulatto color. Here again were the yellow-skinned and almond-eyed Chinese, mingled with the dark, spare and fierce-looking Tartars. Again appeared a group of half-savage Finlanders, or of the wholly savage tribes of Northern Siberia, dressed in midsummer in their fur robes. Many of these had come thousands of miles, to buy or sell at the great Russian fair.

The goods offered for sale were as various as the people. Here were the productions of

Europe, from the laces and silks of France and Holland to the cotton goods and hardware of England. Here were the shawls of Cashmir and the tanned horse-skins of the Tartars. Here the iron of the Ural Mountains, and the holy images and wax candles for sale to the peasants of the Greek church. Here the teas and porcelain of the Chinese, and the costly camel's hair shawls of the Bokharans. Such were a few out of the vast multitude of strange goods that crowded every corner of the fair, from the outer booths to the inner range of warehouses.

And buying and selling was going on with such briskness that the whole crowd seemed wild in the endeavor to dispose of or to purchase some of the endless maze of goods.

"Come ahead, Peter, my boy," cried Clark, as he led the way into the dense crowd. "Our friend the count might as well hunt for a hatchet at the bottom of the Atlantic as to seek us here. We can snap our fingers at his worship."

"Don't be too sure of that," warned Peter nervously. "The count is no fool. It will not be long before all the police of the fair are on the lookout for two traveling Russian carpenters. Folks are very wide-awake here, Mr. Clark."

"And we're not fast asleep, Peter. We've got to swop our rigs, that's flat. There's plenty of chance here. A chap needn't go amiss for a shrewd disguise. What shall we turn into, Peter? Tartars or Chinese, Greeks or Turks, there's clothes of every pattern."

Peter shook his head doubtfully.

"We can't get rid of our faces, Mr. Clark. Nor of our tongues."

"Can't fling their lingo, eh? Very well; suppose we play Cossack. Or here's a Polish rig. I've a notion we would make a handsome pair of Poles."

In fact the variety of varied clothing was so great that it was no easy matter to decide what to choose. Yet Peter's fear was not without warrant. Their appearance might be described and the police of the fair put in search of them. Delay was dangerous.

After some little time the two fugitives succeeded in making the desired change of clothing. Wrapped in long, loose, fur-trimmed *khalat*s, or cloaks, with low, silken caps on their heads, they presented a greatly changed appearance, and might readily have passed for merchants from the far East, but for their European faces.

They had not proceeded far in this new attire ere their attention was attracted by the voices of some passing Russians of official appearance.

"They are somewhere in the fair," said one of these. "Count Orloff has traced them hither. The description is precise. Search must be made at once."

"There are orders from St. Petersburg, you say?" queried the other.

"Yes. And the count is in a perfect fume. You never saw a man in such a torrent of rage. I have a fancy he has been tricked in some way by that young American. You know the Yankee reputation for trickery."

"Yes, yes. But we must show our sharp

youth that the Russians are not quite fools. The fellow is mooning it somewhere about the fair, I suppose, without a fancy that the bulldogs are on his track."

The officers passed on, vanishing in the depths of the crowd.

"I am very much obliged to you I am sure, my dear sharp jackass of a policeman," remarked Clark sarcastically. "But if you think that I am the fool you take me for, I'm afraid you're barking up the wrong tree. We can laugh at them, Peter, as long as we keep in the crowd. They will never think of looking for two strangers in a Tartar rig. Come this way. There's a bit of fun going on, and we might as well take it all in."

Outside the row of booths, in fact, were various places of amusement, as diversified as the side-shows of an American circus. Here were plays in strange languages, yonder were sleight-of-hand performances. Here were savages, six-legged sheep, and fat women; yonder a menagerie made up of half a dozen animals.

In the midst was a large tent, in which circus performances were going on. The astonished Asiatics, some of whom lived on horseback, looked on in wonder at feats which they had not deemed possible, while the acts of the tumblers and the antics of the clown seemed to them something magical.

Further on up the Volga lay a large village, to which, as night approached, there pushed a bustling throng. The houses were handsomely painted and brightly lighted up, while the tinkling sound of the *balalaika*, or Russian guitar, and the lively noise of busy dancers resounded from every house.

Among these places of amusement the crowd spread itself, as the active business of the day ceased with the approach of evening. The two fugitives had spent the day among these busy scenes, Peter in mortal dread of the police, while Clark led the way in reckless disdain of Count Orloff and his schemes.

"Hadn't we best get back to the town?" protested Peter. "We are in great danger here, Mr. Clark."

"We'll be in greater there, Mr. Peter, and you'd see that if you had a grain of wit. Our hotel is marked, you bet on that. We'd be snatched if we set foot in it, so we must find a sleeping-place somewhere on the fair-grounds."

Peter suddenly gripped him by the arm, and Clark turned quickly. There was an ashy pallor on the Russian's face, while his hand was pointing toward a man just in front, with his back toward them.

A single glance sufficed—it was Count Orloff. There was no mistaking that straight, haughty figure, with the well-poised head.

"Back," whispered Clark. "He has not seen us."

At that instant the count turned and looked full in their faces. An expression of surprise came upon his harsh countenance, followed immediately by a malicious satisfaction.

"So, gentlemen," he sarcastically said. "I'm glad to meet you again. Stop, sirrah, you have your head in the lion's mouth this time, sure."

"The lion will have to catch us first. Come, Peter."

Clark darted away, followed by his nimble companion. With a cry of anger the count followed, screaming for the police at the top of his voice.

The crowd had now greatly thinned, and very few people remained among the booths near where they ran. In and out among these booths hurried the two fugitives, followed by an ever-growing crowd.

"Off with your cloak, Peter," cried Clark. "It's bare legs we want now."

Relieved of the flying cloaks they made better progress. But it seemed impossible to escape. The pursuers were close behind, while the alarm was spreading in advance.

They were now among the stone warehouses. Darting around the corner of one of these for a moment the pursuers were out of sight. At the door of this house stood a grave-faced Russian, attracted by the noise.

Clark gazed in his face, while a feeling of recognition flashed into his eyes. He made a peculiar sign, which was answered by the surprised Russian. The latter quickly slipped aside while the two fugitives darted past him into the depths of the store. The next moment the crowd poured around the corner, and rushed fiercely past, yelling wildly as they hurried on.

The Russian had resumed his place at his open door, and looked out on the excited throng with as placid a countenance as if this was a matter of everyday occurrence.

The fugitives crouched out of sight in the dark recesses of the unlit warehouse.

"How did you do it, Mr. Clark?" asked the astounded Peter, in a whisper.

"Hush," answered Clark, in the same tone. "I knew my man. I gave him the secret signal of the Nihilists."

"Oh Lord!" groaned Peter, falling back in utter dismay. "A Nihilist! Mercy on me, but I'd sooner run headforemost on the devil himself!"

CHAPTER VIII.

FACING THE LION.

AS may be imagined there was a fierce and hot chase throughout the precincts of the fair after the vanquished fugitives. The alarm spread far and wide. Many of the traders rushed out of their booths and joined the wild pursuit. Others hastily locked themselves in, with the fancy that the fair-grounds had been invaded by a band of brigands. Wild cries and shouts rung far and wide, though not one in fifty of the pursuers had an idea of what he was in pursuit.

This uncertainty helped to cover up the escape of the fugitives. Count Orloff soon perceived that they had given him the slip. But it was impossible to stop for the purpose of searching the neighboring booths, for the dense crowd behind pushed blindly on, driving forward those in the lead. By the time the disappointed nobleman had managed to escape from the excited throng he was far away from the point where the trail had been lost. And it was not easy to tell, in that great puzzling city of barter, just where this point was.

The merchant who had concealed the fugitives hastened to close and lock his door the in-

stant the crowd had passed. He struck a light, and came back with eager and anxious countenance.

"Who are you?" he demanded, in an excited tone. "I am bound as a brother of the order to protect you to the death. But I know you not."

"I know you," answered Clark coolly. "I saw you last winter in St. Petersburg. Have you forgotten the Young Nihilist; the American boy whom you helped to initiate into the order?"

"What? Is it you?" cried the merchant, holding the light close to Clark's face, and eagerly scanning his features. "Yes, I know you now, brave fellow. For you proved yourself brave."

"Hush," warned Clark. "Peter, my man here, is not a brother of the order. But the cat is out of the bag, and there is no getting it back. But Peter's all right. He would give his head for me, wouldn't you, Peter?"

"I don't know," answered Peter doubtfully. "I'd give my heels, but I don't think I could spare my head."

His utter seriousness set the two others laughing. He seemed to think that Clark was in dead earnest.

"All right, my hearty. But I was tried and acquitted before the imperial court, so I don't care who blows the trumpet."

"But what does all this mean?" queried the alarmed merchant. "Why are you pursued?"

"The authorities are after me like cats after mice," explained Clark. "I'm off for Siberia, but there are orders out to stop me and send me back to St. Petersburg. Now, I don't intend to go back, that's flat. I was recognized in the fair and chased into your fox-hole."

"To Siberia?" repeated the merchant in a tone of surprise. "What in the world takes you there? That's just where brothers of the order don't want to go, and plenty go there against their wills."

"I am going to the rescue of a Nihilist," explained Clark. "Ivan Stretzlitz, who was sent to the mines of the Ural. He saved my life. I owe him one in return."

"A prisoner in the mines? It is impossible! You cannot rescue him."

"I can try," answered Clark with easy confidence. "There is no telling what a cute chap can do if he tries right hard."

"Then luck go with you. Ivan is a friend of mine. But you must leave here at once. The police will search these warehouses. What is to be done?"

"Can you not disguise us?"

"Yes, yes," cried the Russian hastily. "It is a good thought. I will make Tartars of you. I have suits here that will fit you both."

With nervous haste he proceeded to dress them in Tartar costumes. A high, cone-shaped hat with a round rim completed the dress. He then produced a peculiar brown stain, with which he painted their hands and faces until they were of the color of ripe chestnuts. This work done he viewed them with satisfaction.

"A pair of handsome Tartars, on my soul!" he ejaculated. "Do you know anything of the speech?"

"I can talk it pretty well," answered Peter.

"Very good. If you are wide awake you can pass muster. Now, gentlemen, you must go at once. It will not do for you to be found here. Come back to me to-morrow. I will see that you have the means of proceeding on your journey. I cannot go with you to Ivan's rescue, but I can help you in the dangerous enterprise."

He pushed them with nervous haste out of doors, and quickly closed and locked the door of his warehouse behind them.

Clark was moving off with a rapid stride, but he was caught and checked by Peter.

"No Tartar walks that way," explained the latter. "We must walk quietly and gravely, and keep very sober faces. Don't laugh, no matter what happens. And leave all the talking to me."

"Guess I will, Peter. My tongue would sell the game at the first word. Lead on, you wide-awake old coon."

The excitement of the chase had not yet subsided. Groups of people were standing about, eagerly talking and trying to discover what had caused the sudden hubbub.

The fugitives joined some of these groups and listened in amused silence to their wild guesses. It was a pair of Cossack robbers. It was a gang of savages from the North. It was a brace of Nihilists who had tried to assassinate the director of the fair. A dozen guesses were made, all wide of the truth.

"This way, my men. I cannot be mistaken. It was here they disappeared. Search every booth and warehouse in this locality."

The sharp, stern voice was that of Count Orloff. Peter trembled in his boots and turned pale under his paint, on hearing that terrible voice and seeing the face of the dreaded count so near him.

The irate nobleman was followed by a group of policemen, who at once dispersed themselves to obey his orders. He walked up to the group that contained the fugitives.

It was a perilous moment. An attempt at flight would be fatal, and it was almost as dangerous to remain under the count's sharp eyes. Peter nervously edged off, but Clark caught him with a firm grip, and fixed his eyes threateningly on his follower's scared face.

"Keep still, you fool, or I'll burst your brain-box!" he fiercely whispered.

Count Orloff walked up, fixing his keen eyes on the group.

"You gentlemen have remained here. The fugitives hid somewhere about here. Have you seen them? They may have again attempted to escape."

A burst of disclaimers came from the crowd. No one had been seen. They must be still concealed.

"I am not so sure of that," he continued, directly facing Clark, who had preserved all the grave dignity of a Tartar merchant. "They may have come from their hiding-place in disguise."

The reckless youth seemed on the point of answering. It was Peter's turn to pinch him. The frightened *yemshick* burst out in a torrent of

Tartar speech which would have puzzled even a Tartar to understand.

The count shook his head.

"Much obliged, my good sir, but Russian is my native tongue. Here, some of you, can't you answer, and save this worthy Tartar from wasting his jaw-breaking words?"

The count turned away without a shadow of suspicion and addressed some others of the party.

Peter plucked his master by the sleeve and moved gravely away, saying something in the Tartar dialect. Clark at once took the cue and followed him. They moved on at a slow and dignified pace, while the count continued to talk with some of the Russians present. In a few seconds they disappeared around the corner of a booth.

"That worthy son of Tartary must think I am a walking-dictionary," remarked the count with a smile. "Who are they? Do you gentlemen know them?"

"No. They joined us just before you came up."

"They did, eh?" with a quick suspicion. "Can it be? But no, it is impossible that the young American can speak Tartar. Yet the younger one was about his size and build."

The count walked irresolutely after the fugitives. But they had disappeared. They were, in fact, at that moment hurrying with all speed from the dangerous locality. He turned back with a dubious smile, feeling that his suspicion must be a foolish one.

Yet the search, though close and thorough, proved ineffectual. Count Orloff returned to his hotel after a wasted hour, more angry and determined than ever. The more he thought of it the more he feared that he had let his game slip through his fingers in the two Tartars.

Day again dawned. Ere it was an hour old the great fair was once more a busy nest of human beings, talking in as many languages as were spoken at the Tower of Babel.

Clark, followed docilely by Peter, sought their Russian friend at an early hour. What passed between them it is not necessary to repeat in words. It is enough to say that the Russian was true to his promise. He gave them good advice about their enterprise and amply provided them with the means of carrying it out.

In a couple of hours afterward a brace of seeming Tartars crossed the Volga, and set out on their journey over the broad plains beyond. There was no difficulty about this. Hundreds of merchants and buyers who had completed their business at the fair were in like manner traveling eastward.

The two travelers in question were mounted on small but wiry horses, harnessed in Tartar fashion, and seemingly full of blood and fire. In addition there followed them two led horses, well laden with the baggage of the travelers.

They were, in fact, Clark Cloverly and his faithful follower, very glad to be once more on their journey, and out of reach of the Argus eyes of Count Orloff.

"Jolly weather, my boy," cried Clark in enthusiasm, as he gave his horse the rein. "This suits me better than all your carriage travel.

How is it to be? Are we to go like snails on horseback, as well as on foot?"

"No. A Tartar is at home on his horse. You can ride like wild if you want to. And I think we had better."

"Why?"

"Did you not hear the talk at the ferry? It seems that Count Orloff is on the lookout for a couple of Tartars, whom he suspects to be his game in disguise."

"The deuce he is!" ejaculated Clark, with a shrill whistle of surprise. "Hang his sharp picture! Are you sure of that, Peter?"

"Indeed I am. We have got to ride like the wind. We will not go far before the hounds are on our track."

"I don't care that for your Count Orloff," cried Clark, with a snap of his fingers. "He's got to catch us before he can pinch us. And there's such a thing as catching a Tartar. When a chap catches a Tartar he is generally glad enough to let go of him again, you know that, Peter. What route do travelers generally take?"

"They usually go by way of Kasan, the old city of the Tartars."

"Then we will go by some other route. It's a big country, and there ought to be room to hide in it. Let out, Peter. I'm in for a sharp burst."

The active Tartar horses responded readily to the rein, and in a few minutes the travelers were pushing forward at a rapid pace over the level and somewhat sandy roads to the north of the Volga.

They were once more off for Siberia, in a new style and under new characters.

Two hours afterward a troop of savage-looking horsemen, armed with long lances, crossed the floating bridge of the Volga. They were Cossack soldiers, and had been dispatched in all haste after a brace of fugitive horsemen disguised as Tartars.

CHAPTER IX.

PETER AND HIS COSSACKS.

THE day was a bright and fine one, the sun none too warm, while a pleasant northerly breeze swept down over the broad plain. The travelers pushed on at a brisk pace, their baggage-horses following at a sharp trot behind them.

For awhile they followed the main road, passing frequent groups of travelers on their way to or from the fair, some on horseback, others in light Tartar cart, some even trudging contentedly on foot.

The two fugitives reached at length a by-road that led off at a sharp angle to the north. The Yankee boy looked inquiringly at his companion. Peter nodded his head. With a touch to the reins the horses' heads were turned. The next minute they were out of the traveled highway and were trotting rapidly along a smooth road that was almost deserted by travelers.

"A fair field and no favors, my jolly lad," cried Clark, in boyish enthusiasm. "This is what I call living. A good horse under me, a thousand miles before me, free to stop when I

please and go where I choose, and not a care in the wide world. Bless your eyes, old chap, what are you looking so glum about? You ought to be as happy as a king."

"As the king's fool, I fancy," answered Peter, with a solemn shake of the head. "I'd give a whole *taboon* of horses to be well out of this scrape, and in my own little home in Moscow."

"You would, eh? And what is a *taboon*?"

"A herd of horses."

"Well, I wouldn't give the lee side of a horse-hair. I'm at home here, and you'd best make yourself at home. There's danger in it, I suppose, and what if there is? I wouldn't give a fig for our ride if it was all smooth sailing. Hang it, old blue-nose, we've come through twenty scrapes since we left Moscow. I'm the picture of good luck, I tell you. Stick to me, and you can snap your fingers at ill-fate."

"I might do that," grumbled Peter, "but I couldn't snap them at a troop of Cossacks. I saw some of them in Novgorod yesterday. If the count puts them on our track, Lord help us! You can't brag about good luck before a Cossack lance."

"Stir up your spirits, my boy. I don't care a chestnut for a regiment of Cossacks. I see what you want. A swig of *vodka*,* eh?"

"It wouldn't hurt me," answered Peter, with a sigh of hopeful expectation.

Clark laughed as he took a black bottle from the pocket of his saddle.

"I knew it, you cute old rogue. Your soul's in the *vodka* bottle. Drink it out, and make a man of yourself again. You'd give a tadpole the blues, with your confounded grumbling."

The bottle was upturned over Peter's ample mouth, and a gurgling sound came from it, until Clark snatched it hastily from his hand.

"Give it to me, you confounded toper! You'll turn yourself into a whisky barrel next. A Russian always knows when to begin, but he never knows when to stop."

"That's a mistake," answered Peter, already half-tipsy. "He knows well enough."

"When?"

"When the bottle's empty."

The boy laughed at the solemn earnestness with which Peter said this.

"You're a jolly old horse at bottom, if you were weaned on vinegar," he cried, slapping his companion heartily on the back. "And now, old chap, if you've got back your wits and your courage out of the *vodka* bottle, let's stir out. If there's any chance of being chased by Cossacks it won't pay to creep along like snails."

A touch of the spur to their active horses, and they sprung forward into a keen gallop, at as brisk a pace as a Tartar rider himself could have got out of them.

Clark sat his horse like a Centaur. He had been well trained in horsemanship, and this pace was but child's play to him. As for Peter, he seemed part of his horse. The fiery liquor had only tightened his nerves, and he seemed as if frozen into the saddle. The baggage horses followed, with no need of a leading line. They had been trained to their work.

* A strong spirit, made from corn or potatoes.

The country through which they were passing was very different from that on the other side of the Volga. That was a rich and highly cultivated soil, thickly settled, and the seat of an active farming industry. This was poor and sandy. Only sparse crops could be raised, and the herding of cattle took the place of the agriculture south of the river. The villages were very few, and the road nearly deserted.

Hour after hour the fugitives kept on at a steady pace. The horses they rode seemed untiring. The rapid journey of the morning was kept up until after the sun had passed the mid sky, and begun his westward course.

They were now many long miles away from the city of the great fair. The last of the travelers had long been left behind. The country grew wilder and more barren at every mile. Here and there great tracts of woodland arose. They were approaching the vast forests of the North.

"It strikes me that man and horse needs a rest," exclaimed the American boy, as they topped a long incline. "That last pull breathed our creatures. A bite of grub, a draught of water, and an hour's rest, and we'll be good for the road again."

"And the Cossacks?" suggested Peter.

"They are twenty miles behind, if they're an inch. That is if there are any Cossacks, out of your lively fancy. I've a notion, somehow, you dreamed of them."

Peter shook his head dubiously. There was no use talking to his incorrigible young master. They presently drew rein and halted at the foot of an opposite slope, where a gurgling stream ran past and buried itself in the depth of the roadside forest, while a broad spread of green verdure offered rest for man and food for the horses.

The bridles were no sooner removed than the horses ran eagerly to the flowing stream, and drank deep draughts of the grateful water. Their thirst appeased they began a hasty cropping of the rich grasses, that grew luxuriantly beside the stream.

Meanwhile Peter had relieved the baggage-horses of part of their burden, and spread out on a smooth spot some of the abundant provision which the generous Russian had prepared.

"He's a gay old duck, you bet," cried Clark, as he attacked the viands with a traveler's appetite. "I know that sort. He's a bargainer through and through, and would pinch a pig's nose off in a trade. But when business is over he'd give away a cow as quick as one of its horns. Mercy on us, Peter, when are you going to stop eating? You're worse than an alligator."

"I don't know who's made the biggest hole in the pile," grumbled Pete. "We'd best fill ourselves. We may not have time to stop for supper."

"Got that Cossack bee in your bonnet again, eh, Peter? Go ahead, then. Burst your bread-basket if you've a mind. I'm in for a rest."

Clark flung himself at full length on the grass, while Peter continued to eat with an appetite that seemed as if it would have no end.

At length he stopped, with a sigh of regret that he could contain no more, and slowly gathered up the remnants of the feast.

"Hadn't we best be off?" he asked anxiously. "We've had an hour's rest. The horses are good for an afternoon's run."

"I ain't, then," answered Clark, indolently. "It's too royally cool and comfortable here."

"But the Cossacks."

"The Old Nick take the Cossacks! Why, you Jack, we've flung them off the track thirty miles away. I calculate they are off for Kasan hot foot."

Peter shook his head in obstinate doubt.

"You might double on a sleuth-hound, but you can't on a Cossack," he replied. "They track like the Indians of your American woods. They are after us I tell you, Mr. Clark.—And if they catch us—"

He twirled his finger around his neck in significant pantomime.

"Hang us, will they?" queried Clark, indolently.

"As quick as eat parsnips for supper."

"You're worse than a mosquito, Peter," said Clark in an accent of discontent, as he slowly arose to his feet. "Come, we'll trot back to the top of that hill; there must be a good five-mile view from there. I bet you we don't see the glint of a cow's tail."

"I hope not," rejoined Peter; "but it's better to be sure than sorry."

The slope was a long one. Leaving the horses, which had long since satisfied their appetites, still daintily nibbling at the grass, the two travelers walked back to the summit of the hill.

It proved as Clark had said. An extensive view lay spread before them. The forest stopped ere they reached the summit, and a broad open country extended down the slope, over a wide level at its foot, to another incline fully five miles away.

"Still as death, you see," remarked the young man, "and all your panic is wasted. As I told you, there is not the glint of a cow's tail."

"We should have brought a glass," answered Peter; "it's a long stretch for eyesight. What's that gleam in the piece of woods there to the left?"

"The gilded cross on the top of a village church," rejoined Clark. "The sun is on it."

"Look! It has disappeared!"

"There's a cloud on the sun."

"There it glitters again, and nearer us! Our village churches do not travel, young master."

"What is it, then?" with an incredulous shrug.

Peter made no answer, but continued to gaze, while he shaded his eyes with his hands. Suddenly he sprung up, with a gesture of alarm.

"I thought so! It's the glint of a Cossack lance! Look! There they come out into the open! There's fifty lance-points if there's one! And see, do you not notice something moving beneath them?"

"Yes," cried Clark, with sudden energy. "It's a troop of horse as I'm a living rooster! You're right for once, Peter Zavod, and I've

been playing the fool. Hang me if I thought there was so much vim in your Russian troopers! Come, my lovely, there's no time to waste."

They took a last look back. The distant moving object could now be distinctly seen. The steel heads of the long Cossack lances, held upright, glittered like silver in the sun. They were riding at a rapid pace straight toward the fugitives.

Down the hill together went the latter. They had seen enough.

"We've got the best of them yet," declared the young Yankee. "Their horses are blown. Ours are fresh. They won't nab us like flies in a sugar-bowl."

"Shall we keep straight on?"

"Nary time! We must double on these hounds. I'm not to be caught napping by the sharpest Russian that ever kicked."

In a few minutes they were at the foot of the hill. Here they hastened to replace the bridles on the horses, who submitted unwillingly to the operation.

"Mount and away!" cried Clark, springing to his saddle, and heading for the opposite slope.

Peter followed, and the baggage-horses brought up the rear, as before.

"I thought you were going to double on them," cried Peter, out of breath with his haste.

"So I am. But when I double it will be like the fox, not like the rabbit."

"Like the fox?" repeated the puzzled Russian.

"Just so. Don't you see that those fellows are tracking us by our hoof-prints in the dust? If the trail breaks here they'll plunge into the wood after us. But there's a stony reach ahead that will not take a track. That's the spot to slope off."

Peter looked in admiration at his shrewd leader. It was quite evident that the Yankee boy knew what he was about. The frightened *yemshick* began to regain his lost confidence.

In a few minutes the iron hoofs of the horses clattered on a stony bottom. They were mounting a rocky ridge that rose abruptly through the sandy level of the plain.

Clark rode on a few paces, and then turned sharply into the wood at the roadside. Peter followed, with a peculiar call to the baggage horses, that turned them also into the forest.

They rode on for a considerable distance, verging downward toward the stream. This reached, Clark reined up his horse and sprang nimbly to the ground.

"Push on!" he ordered. "Ride straight down the channel, and keep the horses in line after you. I will follow you soon."

"Where are you going?" demanded the astonished Russian.

"Back to ambush those Cossacks. Drive on, old fellow! Don't you fear for me. I want to know what stuff we've got to deal with."

A half-hour afterward, with clatter of hoof and clang of stirrup, the Cossack troop rode up to the spot where the fugitives had halted to dine. They drew rein and looked down on the

telltale spot, their savage faces full of wild satisfaction, while they talked together in a fierce dialect.

From the forest, not twenty paces to their left, a pair of keen eyes gazed at them through a leafy screen.

CHAPTER X.

OFF THROUGH THE WILDWOOD.

THE young American lay safely hidden in his bushy covert and looked with interest on the group of his foes. There was something savage yet something splendid in their appearance, as the sun shone on their swarthy, bearded faces, on their red caps and the glistening points of their long lances. In addition to this weapon they wore a long dagger in their belts, and a short Turkish firelock strapped across their shoulders. Altogether they seemed a gallant and dangerous troop, likely to render a good account of themselves in battle.

The horses, on which they sat with so easy and graceful a carriage, were strongly built animals, with shaggy manes and tails, and trained to obey the least motion of the body of the rider. In battle a Cossack and his horse are one, and the animal moves to his will almost as readily as his own hand moves.

Several of the leading troopers had sprung to the ground, and were closely examining the traces of the halt of the fugitives. As they did so they conversed together in rapid tones, of which only a few sentences came to the attentive ears of the listener.

They investigated the hoof-marks of the horses in the muddy border of the stream, the cropped and trodden grass, and even the fragments of food which remained strewn on the ground.

From the words that came to Clark's ears he was able to catch the bent of their conversation, and he could not help admiring their sagacity, though it promised ill for his hopes of escape.

Into the hoof-marks on the brook side the water was yet oozing. The trodden grass had not begun to erect itself. The particles of food had just been discovered by the ants, and contained only a few of these active insects.

The investigation ended in a few minutes, and the leader turned quickly toward his troops.

"They left here less than half an hour ago," he shouted. "They do not suspect pursuit, or they would not have been so easy over their lunch. They have followed the road straight on. Mount and follow! Mount and follow!"

A wild cry of satisfaction broke from the troop in reply. Those who had alighted sprung to their saddles. A loosening of reins, a touch of spurs, and away went the troop like a whirlwind, sweeping along the road with the regular movement of some mighty machine.

The Yankee boy followed them with his eyes, with hope and satisfaction.

"Splendid fellows they are," he murmured. "Real Don Cossacks. Glorious riders, but the less I see of them the better. I hope they'll follow that road to Jericho, and leave us two orphans to a quiet ride."

Up the long slope beyond swept the rapid troop. Soon their hoofs struck with a ringing clang on the bare rock. They were already

past the spot at which the fugitives had turned into the forest. Clark breathed more freely, and began to hope that he had been too shrewd for his pursuers.

Suddenly there came a flutter in the troop, as when a wave of wind passes over a field of grain. The foremost files had drawn rein. In a moment more the whole troop halted. An old Cossack in advance was pointing significantly to the surface of the roadway.

Clark waited for no more.

"By the seven blessed saints, the cat is out of the bag!" he ejaculated. "It's the best horses and the sharpest wits now in earnest. Here goes for liberty!"

He plunged rapidly away through the wood, following the line of the stream, but keeping to the higher ground above it, where there was little undergrowth. There was not a second to lose. The Cossacks were too sharp to be fooled by a transparent trick. They would be on his track within ten minutes.

Onward at all speed through the untrodden forest plunged the active youth. The pine cones of last year cracked sharply under his tread. Living things rose from their coverts and rushed in fright away. Birds broke in a wild whirr from the bushes. But he heeded nothing of this. It was neck or nothing now, and but a single thought lived within his brain.

Peter had been making good progress. He was nearly two miles away from the scene of the noontide rest ere Clark overtook him. The shrewd *yemschick* was riding straight down the brook, followed by the other three horses. On each side, indeed, it was walled in with a thick growth of bushes, so that it was easy to keep the animals to the water.

He looked back anxiously from time to time, and an exclamation of delight broke from his lips on seeing his young master. The latter quickly overtook him.

"Well done, Peter!" he cried. "Running water leaves no trail!"

"But the Cossack? Have they gone on?"

"No. They will be on our track within ten minutes."

"Then the Lord preserve us!" moaned Peter, with a pious tone that made Clark laugh.

"The Lord helps them that help themselves, Peter. That's the Yankee motto. Push on to that opening in the bushes. There's not a minute to lose in chatter. Push on!"

In a minute more the point in question was reached. Here the bushy wall of the brook was broken away on one side, and it was easy to reach the water's edge.

"Halt!" cried Clark sharply. "Off your horse! We must take the weight from these draft animals. We may have to shift our saddles, and an ounce of extra strength in the horses may be safety."

As he spoke he was rapidly loosening the load of one of the extra horses. Peter took the hint and did the same for the other. Then loading themselves with the heavy burdens they trudged back through the forest for some distance, to a small thicket of bushes, in the midst of which they deposited their loads.

"Bring the provision hamper, Peter. We can't spare that. All the rest must take its

chance. If the Cossacks find our cache, good-by. Escape is the first thing. If we get off we can make our way back here for these things. And now, bridle and spur is the word. And lively's the time!"

He hurried back to where the horses were docilely waiting, cropping the green leaves of the bushes as they did so. The next minute they were in their saddles and pushing onward as briskly as was possible in the bed of the brook.

All around was dead silence. If the pursuers had found their track they were not yet within hearing. In fact, their pursuit could be but slow, since they would necessarily have to be on the watch for hoof-tracks leading from the water.

"Our cache may escape," remarked the boy adventurer. "They will be looking for hoof-tracks, not for foot-prints."

"But when are we going to leave the water?" asked Peter, anxiously. "We cannot follow the brook forever."

"As soon as we strike a good spot, my *moujik*. I'm not going to sleep, Peter, you can bet high on that."

For a half-mile further they continued. Here the bushes ceased and the wood became very thin and open. The rock ridge at this point descended and crossed the stream, presenting a surface covered only by patches of soil.

"Good!" cried Clark, joyfully. "It's just what I was looking for. Up and off's the word now, Peter. Take care to keep your horse to the rock. Don't let him touch grass or soil."

He guided his horse out onto the bare, smooth surface of the stone, followed quickly by Peter. Each taking a rein of the extra horses to prevent them from straying over the grass-grown spots, they rode slowly and cautiously up the sloping rock.

It was no easy progress. Occasionally a hoof slipped on the smooth surface. But after a short progress, they reached a rougher and more level locality.

"Now, Peter plowboy, time's the word, and a fig for your Cossacks. Do you know anything of the country hereaway?"

"Very little. But there are horse-tracks leading through most of these forests."

"On then. The rock is beginning to peter out. There are too many tree-droppings here for my liking. But we are a good quarter-mile away from the water, and may fling our sharp-eyed pursuers."

Soon the rock gave way entirely and they were on the yielding soil again. They walked their horses for some distance, so as to disturb the surface as little as possible.

During the last few minutes peculiar sounds had come to their ears from up-stream, which grew momentarily more definite.

"What is it, Peter?" asked Clark. "It sounds like the jabber of blackbirds."

Peter listened intently for a moment.

"It is the jabber of red birds!" he exclaimed. "The Cossacks are famous tongue-rattlers. They are coming down-stream on our trail."

"Just as I fancied. But we've got the weather-gage of the gentlemen. Here's good-by and away!"

Giving the rein to his eager horse he started off at a trot through the woods, releasing the lead horse. Peter did the same.

Under the shadows of the hoary old pine forest they rode, as briskly as possible, through the maze of crowded tree-trunks that rose everywhere straight and lofty to the leafy canopy that spread far overhead.

It was an impressive scene. This was the primeval forest, grand and ancient. No ax had ever touched those mighty trees. Seldom had the foot of man trod beneath their lofty arches. The sunshine hardly straggled down through the leafy curtain. A damp, cool air lay beneath, tempered now by a refreshing breeze. It was the home of living things that dwelt there undisturbed by man, as they had dwelt ere man came upon the earth. And not only the small fry of life, but larger and more dangerous creatures might there be found. The brown bear rolled his bulky body through these woods. The yelping wolf roamed here in hungry flocks. The young fugitive drew his breath sharply at the thought. He remembered how he had once been chased by a herd of Russian wolves, and what a sharp brush he had had for his life.

On they rode, with free rein. No rapid progress could be made, as there were many obstructions to their route, but they soon gained a mile or two of distance from the stream.

"It looks lighter ahead, Peter," said Clark, pointing forward. "The wood seems to open a trifle."

"I hope it is a cut," answered Peter. "I don't fancy this pathway among the pines."

It proved to be as he had conjectured—a narrow horse-track leading through the forest. Rotting stumps on each side showed where the ax had been at work, and the marks of cart-wheels proved that vehicles occasionally passed that way.

"Heigh-ho, and away. This must lead to some high-road. My blessing on the chap that first chopped his way through here."

They rode onward now more briskly. The track was not very even. Here was a patch of sand, here a pool of water. Occasionally it rose into ridges or sunk into hollows. But it was better than the forest, and they proceeded with some rapidity.

Some three miles they continued when a more open space appeared before them, and they rode out into a highway, whether the one they had lately left or not was uncertain.

It was possible now to advance with more rapidity. The horses were weary with their labor, yet they pricked up their ears at sight of the open road, and started off at a sharp trot.

"That for our Cossacks now." And Clark snapped his fingers. "I bet a cow we leave them in the lurch."

"I doubt that," said Peter sturdily. "You don't know a Cossack."

"I know you're a regular killjoy, and a blasted old ninny," cried the lad sharply in answer. "You ought to be hooped up in a vinegar cask. Let out now, and dry up."

For mile after mile they proceeded. The country continued rolling. Long inclines and

descents succeeded the level of the more southern region.

The afternoon passed slowly away. They were many miles distant from the scene of their late escape. The horses, blown with their labor had now fallen into an easy trot. The wind had sunk away, and an oppressive sultriness reigned. The sky was clear, except for a low, sulphury cloud on the eastern horizon.

They topped a long ascent that ended a straight reach of the road. Here they halted to rest and give the horses a breathing-spell.

"It is confounded close," remarked the young Yankee, wiping his face. "That eastern cloud is growing fast. I hope it holds a puff of wind. Look back, Peter. See if our friends are in sight."

Peter obeyed. Clark continued to fix his eyes on the cloud, that was rising with strange rapidity, and presented a peculiar lurid aspect.

Suddenly his follower cried out, as sharply as if something had stung him:

"By Heaven, they come! Look, my master! Yonder are their lances! They are less than a mile away!"

Clark looked back while a harsh cry broke from his lips. There was the troop of pursuers plainly in sight!

"Your Cossacks are devils," he cried. "A fox-hound could not track surer! But, by Jove, they shall not catch me! Shift your saddle, Peter. There's not a second to lose. We must mount these fresh horses and give the others a resting-spell."

The suggestion was a good one. In a minute the saddles were shifted to the extra horses and the others set loose.

During this interval the pursuers had come much nearer.

A wild cry came faintly to the ears of the fugitives. They had been seen! The chase had reached its climax now!

There were fifty chances of capture to one of escape!

A touch to the reins, a call to the horses. Off and away once more! And up the opposite slope, like a terrible meteor, came the savage troop of Cossack cavalry!

CHAPTER XI.

A RUSSIAN HURRICANE.

"I've heard of Indian trailing, Pete," said the American boy, as they rode briskly side by side down the hill slope, "but your Cossacks are no slouches. A prairie scout would have to be wide awake to discount them."

"They haven't caught us yet," answered Peter. "Nor they won't."

"Why?"

"Do you feel that?" A keen gust of wind struck their faces.

"Yes."

"It is the first puff of the *bouran*."

"The *bouran*? And what the blazes is a *bouran*?"

Peter answered by pointing to the sky before them. The peculiar cloud which had been seen on the horizon had risen with strange rapidity, and now stretched, like a long dun wall, across

the whole sky. Its front was of a lurid hue, and seemed torn into flying shreds. Behind it rolled over and over, like sea breakers.

"You will know what it is, inside a minute," cried Peter. "Ride hard. We must strike the valley before it reaches us."

On down the hill they went, at breakneck pace, the horses seeming to realize the necessity for speed. The puffs of air grew sharper at every moment. In a minute more the valley level was reached. At the same instant the head of the Cossack troops appeared on the summit they had just left.

And with a whistle that quickly became a howl, the *bouran* came, a terrible blow, that nothing living could long face in safety.

As when a dam breaks and the waters of a lake pour out on the low lands, sweeping all before them in their flow, so came the wind. In a moment the air was full of leaves, twigs and branches, torn and twisted from the trees. The sand that had been scooped from the road darkened the air. It seemed as if all the demons of the sky were abroad, howling in fiendish exultation. Now and then a terrible crash could be heard, as a huge tree, uprooted or broken in twain, tumbled headlong in the forest.

The fugitives were protected from the full fury of the hurricane by their position in the valley, with an elevation on either side, and by the thick forest growth surrounding, but the Cossacks, on the hill summit, were caught in its full rage. The foremost files, which had appeared on the ridge, went down as if before a lightning stroke, man and horse hurled to the ground. The others, who had not yet gained the peak, hastily turned, and fled in frightened haste down the hill, their speed redoubled by the terrible pushing force of the wind.

An involuntary laugh broke from the hunted Yankee boy's lips, as he saw the pursuing Don Cossacks lifted like straws from their horses, and hurled headlong to the ground.

"So that's a *bouran*," he remarked. "I know what it is now. Lucky we got down into the hollow. What's to do now, Peter?"

"We cannot stay here," answered the Russian. "It will blow out in ten minutes. And we can't ride up-hill against it."

"That's all what we can't do. What can we do?"

"Follow the valley down into the woods," answered Peter. "It's risky, for the trees and branches are tumbling. But it is our only chance."

"Then go's the word! Come on, lively! We must make hay while the wind blows."

He turned his frightened horse and rode into the open forest. Peter and the other horses followed.

Along the valley bottom they rode. The wood was here open, and progress was easy, yet the roar of the wind through the trees was such that they could make themselves heard only by shouting at the top of their voices.

The wind scarcely touched them here, but it was doing wild work in the tree-tops, which bent before it till they seemed ready to sweep to the ground, while twigs and small branches came rattling down in a shower.

"I don't know which is worse, the wind or the Cossacks!" shouted Clark.

"Back! for your life!" roared Peter in reply. "Here it comes!"

They reined up so sharply as to throw the horses on their haunches. At the same moment a snapping sound, like the crack of near-by thunder, struck their ears, and a huge tree-trunk, broken in two as a child might break a twig, came rushing and roaring down with a swoop as of some huge bird.

It struck the ground with a terrible crash. But that they had reined up so opportunely, they would have been crushed into fragments beneath its mighty limbs.

"By all that's good, that was a narrow squeak!" cried Clark, drawing his breath with a gasp. "Two seconds more, and our journey would have been at an end. But a miss is as good as a mile, and the Cossacks are behind us. Come on, Peter."

He rode up into the wood, around the obstruction that lay across their path. They now moved more slowly, keeping eye and ear open. It was not safe to ride carelessly through such perils.

For some ten minutes they proceeded. It was as Peter had declared. The *bouran* began to blow itself out. The howl of the wind decreased, and the rain of fragments grew less incessant.

"So far so good," said Clark, reining up his horse to a walk. "The wind has blown its best, but the Cossacks haven't. Will they strike our trail again?"

"Any man with a grain of wit would come this way. They will know that, and follow."

"How long is it to sunset?"

"Two hours yet."

"Plenty time enough to overrun us. Our horses should be the freshest, yet these Cossack brutes seem to be hounds for sticking. If we keep on they are going to nab us."

"I think so," answered Peter.

"Then, my darling fellow, there's nothing for it but to play a new countermarch on them. We must leave the hollow, and strike at random back into the forest."

"It may work," answered Peter, hopefully.

"They will hardly be able to trace our trail."

"Trail? There will be none. Don't you see, old stupid, that this shower of leaves and twigs would cover up the trail of an elephant? Now's our time, before the wind goes down. Come ahead!"

He rode at an angle into the forest, ascending the hillside to the left. Peter obediently followed. The free horses trotted on in the rear. They had been well trained. On into the gloomy wood proceeded the cavalcade. It was nearly as dark as if the night had fallen, from the overhanging canopy of leaves and the black storm-clouds. They were forced to move slowly to avoid danger. Here and there a great branch or a fallen tree obstructed the way, and forced them to ride around.

But the wind was momentarily declining. It came now in puffs, rather than in a steady blow. Every minute its violence decreased. The forest grew lighter. Suddenly a clear beam of

light shot athwart their path. The sun had broken through a rift in the clouds.

"The hurricane has blown out," suggested Clark.

"It's wind is broken at any rate," answered Peter.

"And our Cossack friends?"

"Will be after us in a jiffy."

"Then I am not going to run any further. I will leave you here with the horses. Here is a nook between the fallen tree and the thicket, which will make a prime hiding-place. Lead the beasts in there."

"And you?" asked Peter, in alarm.

"I am not going it blind any longer. I want to spy out the lay of the land."

"You are not going to venture back?"

"Just so."

"Lord bless us, young master, you'll be taken sure! You don't know Cossacks!"

"Excuse me, friend Peter. I know them better than you think. But they don't know Yankees. They won't snap me up so easy now I tell you. I've cut my eye-teeth, if I am only a boy. Don't worry off your night-cap about me."

He cut short further discussion by walking rapidly back into the woods, leaving Peter in a fright behind with the horses.

Clark moved quickly on, regardless of the alarm of his follower. They were a mile back from the ravine, but his rapid pace soon brought him within sight of it.

The gale had now sunk into a gentle wind. The clouds had broken away and left a free field for the sunlight. The beams of the declining sun shot here and there between the tree-trunks, in level rays of light.

The bushy top of a fallen tree offered him a safe ambush. He crawled up the stout trunk until he was well hidden among the leaves. From here he had an open view of the valley. He fixed his eyes on a spot where a sunbeam broke through the gathering gloom and lay like a brilliant web of light across the woodland way.

Everything was silent around him. The uproar which a half-hour before had filled the forest with deafening noise, had subsided. Deep silence succeeded. It seemed as if the whole world of life had been scared and was not yet over its fright.

For a full half-hour he waited, while this breathless silence continued. Then a faint stir came to his attentive ears. The sound increased. He fixed his eyes steadily up the ravine. Suddenly a red flash broke into sight and immediately disappeared. Clark's keen senses were not deceived. It was the red cap of a Cossack on which a beam of light had momentarily fallen.

And now the sounds were unmistakable. They were the tread of hoofs, and the tones of human voices. In a moment more the band of Cossack pursuers rode into sight, slowly following the course of the ravine.

The ambushed spy held his breath as he noted their savage faces, full of energy and anger at being so long baffled.

They came on spread out widely, and keenly

noting every foot of the ground. He sunk down on the sheltering trunk as some of them rode directly toward him. In a minute more the tree in which he lay hidden was surrounded, the line of pursuers spreading out so as to embrace both sides of it. He held his breath in suspense. One black-bearded fellow was near enough to touch him with his lance-point.

Meanwhile Peter had led the horses into the covert indicated by the young American. Leaving them there he remained anxiously at the entrance, waiting for the return of the risky youth.

An hour passed slowly away. Another hour followed it into the shadows of time. Yet no trace of the daring boy appeared. Peter grew terribly alarmed. The nightfall had come, yet Clark was still absent. Where was he? Had he fallen into the hands of the Cossacks?

The honest fellow, who had a strong affection for his young master, was in an agony of apprehension. Several times he made a move to go in search of him, but the increasing darkness warned him that this would be useless. He dared not call. No one could tell what ears might be within hearing. Deep darkness descended. He continued to wait in terror, while hour after hour passed. Clark continued absent.

The honest guide dropped on the ground. He strove to keep awake, yet ere he knew it slumber had settled on his eyes. When he opened them again the sun was gleaming on the tree-tops. The night had passed. Another day had beamed. But the missing youth was still absent.

Peter sprang hastily up, determined to go at once in search. He could bear the suspense no longer. Yet he had not taken ten steps ere there came to him from the woods a distant cry:

"Ahoy, Peter! Peter, 'hoy!"

There was no mistaking the voice. Peter put his fingers to his lips and sent out a shrill whistle in response.

Soon footsteps were heard, and the form of the missing youth broke into sight, advancing at a full run.

"The Lord be praised!" exclaimed the overjoyed Russian. "I thought I had looked my last on you."

"Sound as a trivet," cried Clark in return. "The hounds are completely dished, my boy. They went on down the valley. They must be ten miles away."

"And where have you been? I haven't slept a wink for terror."

"Tell that to the marines," laughed Clark. "I lost my way in the darkness. It was not safe to call, so I took a woodland bed, and snoozed like a porker. Had a narrow streak, though. They were near enough to touch me, but passed by without seeing."

"I always said you risk too much. And what's to do now?"

"Go back for our baggage," answered Clark. "The coast is clear. Men and horses are rested. Off for Siberia is the word, and a fig for the Cossacks."

They were quickly mounted, and riding

through the woods in search of the place where they had cached their baggage.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST BREATH OF SUSPICION.

THREE weeks have passed away since the morning in which we left the fugitives in the woods of the Volga. They are still at liberty. It is a bright day in mid September. The heat of the summer has passed away, and there is a chill in the breeze that blows downward from the north that has in it a premonition of the coming winter.

But a remarkable change has taken place in their situation and appearance. We left them wandering on horseback through the forest. We find them again on the deck of a broad-bottomed vessel, which is moving slowly, by sail and oars, up the stream of a narrow and winding river. We left them dressed as Tartars. We find them again in Russian attire, though with something fantastic in their dress.

This radical change had become necessary. The discomfited Cossacks had spread far and wide the story of the fugitives, and had scoured the country for days in pursuit. The orders of Count Orloff had been to spare no effort to capture them, and this was a service just suited to the Cossack humor.

As may be imagined, then, the further progress of the young Yankee and his attendant had not been a safe one. They had managed to escape arrest but had made several narrow slips. Matters were getting much too hot, and it became evident that some new disguise and method of travel must be adopted.

In consequence they had sold their horses to the Chuvases, a tribe of the Russian aborigines who were not much given to aid the authorities in their designs, and had obtained suits of Chavasian dresses in exchange for their Tartar clothing.

This attire consisted of white linen trowsers, and a sort of frock of like material which was fastened with a girdle around the hips. Strips of black cloth were wound around the legs, from the foot to the knee.

Thus dressed, and their Tartar horses exchanged for a mule cart, with which they jogged on slowly northward, they presented an appearance widely different from that which they had lately borne. No suspicion was raised in the villages through which they passed, particularly as Peter seemed able to talk in every Russian dialect.

Several weeks, as above said, passed in this journey, at the end of which time they reached the banks the Ai, a small river that flows southward from the Ural mountains.

It is a stream of great importance to the Russians. In fact there is water communication over all the northern part of Russia. Vessels, laden with the iron and other products of the Ural mines, move south from river to river, with the aid of short canals, until they reach St. Petersburg, 1,850 miles away without counting the many windings of the rivers.

It was on one of the peculiar vessels that navigate these island waters that the travelers now found themselves. It was a flat-bottomed craft,

about a hundred feet long, with straight and parallel sides. Instead of rounding at the bow it ended both at bow and stern in a sort of triangle.

This boat moved slowly northward, principally by the aid of a pair of huge sweeps. It was warped past difficult places by a rope carried to the shore. Here and there a low, broad sail was hoisted, to take advantage of a favorable wind.

On the deck of this craft stood our two friends, full of exultation at having so successfully distanced the bloodhounds of the law.

The stream wound through a narrow valley, closed in with ranges of hills, which were covered with woods, except where a patch of meadow here and there broke through. Far ahead higher elevations could be seen, blue peaks that stood out against the sky.

"We are out of the lowlands at last," declared Clark, as he looked with satisfaction on the yet distant mountains. "We have been chased like rabbits through a thousand miles of your Russian flats. It is good for the eyesight to see the hills at last."

"They are the Ural mountains," explained Peter. "They are full of mines. Many exiles are sent there to work. But others are sent to the Yerschink mines, two thousand miles away. Do you know where your man is?"

"Somewhere in the Urals," answered Clark. "Have you been here before, Peter?"

"I know every foot of the hills, and have been in every mine," replied Peter proudly.

"The deuce you say! And you never mentioned that before! You are my man for a thousand. The first thing is to find Ivan. The next is to give the guards leg-bail. Are you with me in that?"

"Anything, Mr. Clark. You pay like a prince. But I would help you without pay, if I had to give my head in your service."

"Solid oak, Peter. Give me your hand, old chap. Cautious! Here comes our worthy captain."

The commander of the vessel, a tall, stalwart fellow, with a face as brown as a bronze kettle and as rough as a nutmeg-grater, joined his passengers at this moment.

"I hope you are enjoying your trip," he said to Clark, fixing his keen eyes upon him.

"Bravely," answered Clark. "It is a fine country. And the breath of the hills is a sweet odor after a month in the lowlands. When will you reach your destination, captain?"

"To-morrow night, if all goes well. By the way, what is your object in going North?"

"I have paid my way, I believe," answered Clark, sharply. "Do travelers in these regions have to pay and tell their business both?"

"Yes," replied the captain. "One would think you were not a Russian that you ask such a question."

There was suspicion in the look which he fixed on his passenger.

"I am from Odessa," replied Clark, coolly. "There we do not live under suspicion, as you do here in the North."

"I have just been told," continued the captain, "of two fugitives from the law, who have been pursued up into this region. One of them

is a young American. Perhaps in your journey you may have met with these reprobates."

"We have met a good many people," answered Clark, with perfect coolness. "Can you describe them?"

"No; I have not heard their description."

"Very well. You are hoeing the wrong corn-field if you take me for your man. Here is my passport. If you think I am stray game you had best take a glint at it."

There was a haughty expression in his face as he handed the formidable parchment to the commander. At the same moment he made a secret threatening sign to Peter, who stood the picture of consternation behind the captain's back.

The latter deliberately unfolded the parchment, and appeared to read with keen scrutiny its contents. He looked occasionally from it to Clark, as if comparing the description with his person. At length he folded and returned it with a respectful bow.

"Issued from the imperial office at St. Petersburg?" he queried.

"As you have seen," answered Clark, with a faint smile on his face.

"It is all correct. Excuse me if I had a moment's suspicion. We have to be wide awake in these days. I hope you will have a pleasant journey."

He turned away to another part of the vessel. Clark looked toward Peter, whose face was full of amazement.

"Why, the fellow didn't read a word of it," he blurted out. "He held the document upside down."

"I know it," answered Clark, dryly.

"Then what made him say it was all right?"

"Because he read me instead of the passport. If I had been scared, like you, our goose would have been cooked for certain. There's something in keeping a stiff upper lip."

"But the story is spreading," rejoined the frightened Russian.

"That's so. And it will beat us hollow if we stick to this slow boat. We must hire a horse team to-morrow and hurry north. The hours are growing precious now. If the mining authorities are put on their guard our cake is all dough."

The vessel stopped for the night an hour or two afterward at a sharp curve in the stream. It was moored to trees on the bank, and the crew collected on shore around watch-fires, which the cool night air rendered agreeable.

Here they passed a jolly evening, singing and playing on the *balaika*, or Russian guitar, while they drank with great zest the sap of the birch trees, which they drew from notches cut through the bark.

Thus the evening passed gayly away. Stretched on the green sward, with no bed but the grass and no covering but the sky, they slept through the night as comfortably as if they had been in the softest of beds.

The next morning the travelers succeeded in hiring a springless cart and a brace of horses from a peasant in the neighborhood.

"Good-by, captain," said Clark, gayly. "You are too slow for us. Any news for the

mountains? We will be there a day or two ahead of your slow team."

"You are in a glory of a hurry," growled the captain, not too well pleased.

"Time presses, my dear sir. Good-by, and a pleasant voyage."

The captain looked after them somewhat grimly, as they mounted their vehicle, and drove rapidly away.

"Hang me if I don't believe that young fellow is the American, after all," he grumbled. "If it turns out so, I'll punch my head."

Heedless of these suspicions the travelers moved on, slowly ascending the high lands that bordered the mountains.

Two days afterward they had left the first chain of the Urals behind them, and stood on the summit of a low ridge of hills that ran nearly due north and south.

"Do you know where we are?" asked Peter.

"In the heart of the Urals, I suppose."

"We are on the dividing line between Europe and Asia. You stand at this minute with one foot in Russia and one in Siberia."

"On the ground at last, then," cried Clark in exultation. "Now to finish our work."

CHAPTER XIII.

A BOLD ENTERPRISE.

THE long chain of the Ural mountains, which forms the dividing-line between Europe and Asia, is nowhere of any great height. No Alpine peaks can be seen throughout its whole extent, but it makes up for want of height by richness of material. It has long been celebrated for its valuable mines, which consist principally of iron, lead and gold, of which precious metal the production is very considerable.

Many valuable minerals are also found there, including amethysts, topazes, emeralds, and other precious stones.

During the week which followed their arrival in the mountains, Clark and his companion made a thorough examination of the mines, which stretched for many miles along the chain of hills. His passport gave him free admission, and he silenced all awkward questions by claiming to be on a scientific expedition for the Government.

But it was the troops of exiles, rather than the iron ore, to which he gave his chief attention. These unhappy fellows, the unlucky prisoners of the stern Russian Government, are forced to work year after year in the dismal depths of the mines, under the eyes and guns of guards with orders to shoot them down at a sign of an outbreak.

Their life is a hapless and cruel one, the hard labors of the day being followed by a night in a narrow, uncomfortable cabin, where they are locked up until the next day brings its new labors. Thus day and year passed, without hope and without relief.

Yet Clark's quest seemed likely to be a useless one. The well-known face of Ivan was not to be seen, though hundreds of the exiles passed under his notice. All the principal mines were examined without effect.

"Perhaps he may be released," said Peter.

"They are sometimes let off for good behavior, and sent as farmers to eastern Siberia."

"Not those who took part in killing the emperor," answered Clark. "That sort will get no mercy. But I will see if I can find out anything."

The next day he questioned the director of the mine which they had just examined, in regard to the disposal of well-behaved convicts.

"That depends on their crime," he answered.

"Some are sent here for life. Some for a few years only. If a man, however, shows any special talent, he may be sent to the Government work-shops at Perm, to the jewel factories, where the precious stones are cut, or to the quarries on the Iset. I sent off two of our smartest convicts to the latter last week. Here are their names."

He opened the book in which the account of the exiles was kept. The young American's eyes fell listlessly on the page pointed out to him, but he had much ado to repress a cry of joy on perceiving the first of the two names.

There it was, the name of the man he sought. Ivan Stretzlitz!

He restrained himself with difficulty, and forced himself to speak with cool indifference.

"I see," he remarked. "The rogues get much better treatment than they deserve. But the Government may as well get all out of them they are fit for. What kind of work is done in these quarries? I have never heard of them."

"You must have seen their work. All sorts of ornamental stone are turned out. Carved columns, vases, and the like. The stone is not cut with a chisel in the usual slow fashion, but is worked with a cutting edge, moved by water-power. It is wonderful what work they do, and how fast it is turned out."

"I must certainly visit these quarries," remarked Clark. "Where are they situated?"

"On the Iset river, fifty miles due north from here."

"A long journey to see a quarry. But I have made a much longer one to visit the mines."

The next day Clark drove north with a contented heart. He had finally succeeded in nailing his man. The worst part of the enterprise lay yet ahead.

The road was a rough one and their progress not very rapid. They were two days in reaching the valley of the Iset over the rugged mountain ways.

The stream was a narrow and swift one that flowed in a slender valley between two tall walls of rock. One of these formed the quarry from which was obtained the beautiful colored stones, which were worked into a great variety of shapes in the Government workshop. This was an extensive building, its power coming from a great water-wheel set in the swift current of the Iset.

It was near evening when Clark reached the locality. As he stood near the entrance of the workshops, talking with the director, to whom he had just shown his passport, the workmen fled out, their day's work being done.

The Yankee boy kept his eyes steadily on them. But the greater part passed without a sign of Ivan's well-known face.

"What ails that man who has dropped down there? Stir him up with your whip," cried the director to a guard.

The fallen convict sprung hastily to his feet. Clark looked toward him. A red flush shot into his brow as he recognized the face of the man he had come two thousand miles, through all dangers, to rescue. It was Ivan Stretzlitz!

The shrewd youth turned away and entered into an indifferent conversation with the director. But he had caught Ivan's eye and knew that he was recognized. The fall of the convict, in fact, had been managed to conceal a sudden show of exultation in his face.

"A hang-dog gang," remarked the disguised Yankee boy easily to the director. "Do you not have a good deal of trouble with them?"

"Not much. They are watched too closely. The whip and the rifle are good persuaders."

"Locked up at night, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. We don't care to have our throats cut at midnight."

They walked slowly away. Ivan had passed on without venturing to look behind. Yet his heart was beating high with hope. On a former occasion, on the ice of the Neva at St. Petersburg, he had saved Clark Cloverly's life. Was the youth here to repay his debt? the hapless convict asked himself. He did not dare speak to a companion for fear his very tones would reveal what was passing in his heart.

The next day he pursued his labors with a throbbing expectation. Clark passed through the factory in company with the director, followed at a few paces by the shrewd Peter.

They stopped opposite where Ivan was at work.

"That is charmingly done," said Clark, pointing to the foliage which was worked into the hard stone. "Is this man an old hand?"

"No, but he is very expert. Take care there, fellow! By Heaven, you have ruined that job!"

Ivan's hand had nervously slipped, and the broad carved leaf was chipped off the stone. He turned to apologize.

"I am but a new hand, dear sir," he humbly declared.

"If you were not I would order you the whip," answered the director sternly, as he walked on with the visitors.

As Peter followed he managed to brush very closely by the convict. Unseen to any of the guards, a slip of paper passed into the hand of the latter.

Ivan turned again to his work. The attention of the guards was diverted toward the visitors. The convict took the opportunity to hastily open and peruse the written slip.

It contained but a dozen words, yet they sent a flush of hope and joy through his bronzed countenance. He quickly slipped the perilous paper into his mouth and commenced to chew it, while he turned again to his work.

The day passed; another succeeded, and Clark continued the guest of the director. The latter, in fact, became more attentive and polite than he had been on the preceding day, yet there was something in his manner that was not alto-

gether natural—something that roused a doubt in the mind of the shrewd young American.

He had sought his room after dinner, when Peter entered with a stealthy tread and a face of ominous meaning.

"What has broke loose now?" demanded Clark.

"Hush! Moderate your tone! We are in danger! The story of our escape has reached here, and we are suspected!"

"How do you know this?"

"I overheard a conversation. I have been making use of my ears."

"I fancied there was something wrong," Clark thoughtfully answered. "The director is too confoundedly civil."

"He wants to hold on to us until he is sure," answered Peter. "He has sent back to Miash for a description of the fugitives, and he will do nothing till he finds if we are the right persons."

"And what shall we do meanwhile?"

"We must fly!" cried Peter. "It will be too late if we wait till night."

"But how about Ivan?"

"The deuce take Ivan!"

"No, we will take him, instead of the deuce. It is all arranged now. He can slip out from his work, and remain a half-hour without being missed. If he can make the grove just below the factory, all may be right. Our horses are ready in the peasant's cabin on the other side of the wood. Quick, Peter—time presses! You must manage to get this into his hands within the next hour. I will see about the rest."

He hastily wrote on a narrow slip of paper, which he folded up very closely. Peter took the missive and quickly left the room.

"I will give it to him in a chew of tobacco, if there is no other way," he said to himself, as he sought the factory.

The Yankee boy's face was very resolute as he completed his preparations. He accosted the director very coolly, on meeting him a half-hour afterward.

"I want to take a look at your quarry," he remarked. "Don't let me disturb you from your duties."

"Why, if you can excuse me," said the director.

"Certainly. There is an outcrop of rock there that looks interesting."

Clark walked away, humming a verse of a song. The director followed him with his eyes.

"I hardly know," he muttered. "He looks honest and innocent."

Fifteen minutes afterward the young adventurer entered the grove to which he had alluded. He was there but a few minutes when Peter joined him, with an excited face.

"It is done!" he announced. "He will try it. I saw it in his face."

"Then let us off. It is a slim chance, Peter. If we are caught it is all up with us. But never say die. They'll not catch me easy."

A half hour afterward they stood at a point a mile down the river's course. Both were mounted on strong and hardy horses. Peter held the rein of a third horse, ready bridled and saddled. They waited impatiently.

"I hope he will succeed. It is the last chance," declared the American.

A head lifted above the shelter of a rock near by. Then a form sprang joyfully up. It was Ivan the convict!

"My preserver! My savior!" he cried, running toward Clark, with suffused eyes.

"None of that!" came the hasty warning. "Drop all sentiment till we are out of this ugly hole. Here's your horse, Ivan. Can you ride?"

"Like a Tartar."

"Then mount and away. The hounds will be sharp on our track within an hour."

Off down the borders of the stream they went at full speed, the iron hoofs of their horses ringing loudly on its stony bed.

At almost the same instant a sharp cry came from the factory.

"A prisoner escaped!"

A dozen guards ran out, with trailed rifles, eager and excited. The director came hastily from his house, drawn by the sudden uproar.

"What has happened?" he asked.

"A prisoner has disappeared. Ivan Stretzlitz, one of the new men."

"Search for him at once. He must be concealed in the neighborhood."

As he spoke a horseman rode hastily up, from the upper road.

"Back, eh?" cried the director eagerly. "Have you got it?"

"Here it is."

He hastily tore open the document handed him, and cast his eyes over its contents.

"By Jove, I knew it! The description is exact. They are the runaways. Hurry to the quarry and ask the stranger to step here."

But the stranger had disappeared. Neither he nor his servant was to be found.

"It is a rescue!" cried the director excitedly. "The convict has escaped with them! Quick, there is no time to lose! Let every place be searched! Bring out the horses, and fetch me my pistols! The wolves! we will run them down, if we search all Siberia!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST LEAP FOR LIBERTY.

ON down the narrow road beside the stream rode the fugitives at full speed. For an hour now they had ridden without sight of pursuers. Yet the stream was a winding one. It was impossible at any point to gain a long look back. Doubtless the stag-hounds of the law were sharp upon their track.

The Yankee boy looked anxiously from side to side. It was very unsafe to follow this valley road, yet he saw no way to escape from it. On one side ran the river, too rapid to cross. On the other was a range of wooded hills, without an opening in their rugged walls.

"This business begins to look blue," he said, with a grimace. "We are in a trap here. If they have good horses at the factory they will run us down."

"They will have to shoot me down before they can take me," cried Ivan, savagely. "I will not go back to captivity."

"We might fly the horses and take to the hills if we are pressed too close," suggested the young

American, casting his eye upon their steep wooded flanks.

"It won't do," answered Pete, shaking his head decidedly.

"Why not?"

"You don't know those hills. We would starve there if we escape capture."

"And is there no mountain path practicable for horses? You know this country."

"There is," rejoined Peter. "It is a mile or two ahead. But it is on yonder side of the river. We cannot reach it. The stream is swollen by the rains, and no horse alive can swim it."

The young adventurer took a critical look at the river. He made no answer. It seemed to be as Peter had said. The river was evidently impassable. He loosened the pistols in his belt.

"I am with you, Ivan," he said. "We will have a terrible life before us if we are taken prisoners. A man can die but once, and if we do we will have company."

"I will never be taken alive," repeated Ivan.

They had now gained a straighter reach of the river. For more than half a mile it ran onward without a curve. On with full speed fled the fugitives, their horses needing neither whip nor spur. At the end of this reach the stream abruptly curved. Ere rounding the curve they looked involuntarily back. And, at the same moment, around the distant curve, rode a troop of horsemen, who flung their caps into the air at sight of the fugitives.

"By all that's good, there they come!" cried Clark. "Twenty of them if there's a man! And better mounted than we are. We've got to trust to luck now in earnest, my jolly boys."

"Trust to luck is a poor rule," replied Ivan, with set lips.

"What else have we to trust to?"

Ivan said nothing, but looked keenly ahead. The stream ran straight here again, and the wall of rocks was as unbroken as ever.

"Did you not say there was a mountain-pass hereabouts?" he asked Peter.

"Yes. But it is on the wrong side of the stream. Look ahead there. Do you see the tall, mossy rock that comes nearly to the water's edge?"

"Yes."

"The pass opens just beyond that."

Ivan looked at the point in question with knitted brows. He then cast his eyes back. Yonder came the pursuers again, rounding the curve which the fugitives had lately left.

"Trust to luck, you say," he remarked, with stern set lips. "There's something better than luck to trust to, and here goes."

"What are you up to, you madman?"

"The river is our only chance. We may as well drown as be hung or shot. Follow me if you are wise."

He turned his horse to the high bank of the stream, lifted him with the rein and touched him with the whip. A quick, wild leap, and in an instant the noble animal was in the foaming waters of the rapid stream.

Peter drew back in fear.

"What is to be done?" he exclaimed. "No horse can cross that river alive!"

"This is to be done," cried Clark. "No Yankee ever backed water before a Russian. Come, Peter. We might as well die by water as by lead."

In quick succession the two horses plunged into the perilous stream. A moment's sentiment of courage had been stirred in Peter's heart.

The three animals, with their bold riders, were struggling in the swift-flowing waters, which threatened to bear them on to certain destruction.

The pursuers checked their horses up for a moment at sight of this apparently suicidal deed.

"The daring villains! They will never do it alive!" cried the director. "Come on, men. We may have their corpses to take back."

They rode briskly forward again, while the fugitives were borne rapidly down the stream, their horses vainly struggling against its torrent-like current.

Yet Ivan Stretzlitz was not quite mad. There was one chance for safety and he had taken it.

At no great distance ahead the stream made a sharp curve. It was probable that the current would sweep across and hug the bank at that point.

"Keep your horses in mid-channel," he shouted to Clark and Peter. "Don't let them try to swim. The eddy will carry us close to the point yonder. Save your strength till then. Be ready. It's got to be a sharp struggle when it comes."

They were quick to take the cue. The horses ceased their effort to swim as they were guided into the mid-current. It swept them onward with frightful speed, curving across as Ivan had conjectured.

In a few seconds they were near the opposite bank, not ten feet distant from the steeply-sloping shore.

"Now," cried Ivan, guiding his horse toward the bank.

The animal was quick to perceive his chance for life, and swam with desperate energy. On he swept, drawing momentarily nearer and nearer. Now not five feet separated him from the shore. Now his feet struck bottom. In a second, with the activity of a deer, he scrambled up the sloping bank.

Varied success attended the efforts of the other two. Clark's horse also gained the shallows, and clung desperately to the rocky bottom. But Peter was further out. His animal struggled desperately, but it was evident that he would be swept past the point, around which the stream ran with the speed of a mill-race.

"Your hand, Peter," cried Clark, as his unlucky servant swept past within reach.

Peter grasped, as a last hope, the hand extended to him. A firm grip, a quick jerk, he was out of the saddle and drawn sharply through the water. The horse, with a wild scream of fear, was swept helplessly around the point, and borne onward to what seemed sure destruction.

The young American's horse was nearly jerked

from his insecure footing by the effort. But Ivan, who had leaped from his saddle, caught the rein of the the trembling animal, and sustained his yielding feet.

"Out of your saddle!" he cried. "We must help the horses up this bank. Quick! They will be on us in a second."

Peter by this time had gained footing. Clark sprung from the saddle and grasped the bridle of his struggling horse. Up the steep bank they hurried, the sure-footed mountain horses scrambling after them. And down the opposite side of the narrow river came the pursuers, with a yell of rage as they saw the success of the desperate effort of the fugitives.

The bank, though steep, was not high. The three men quickly gained its upper edge. One of the horses had his forefeet on the upper level. The other was close behind. At this moment came a quick flash, a loud roar, and a storm of bullets swept across the stream.

For the most part they whistled uselessly by. But the hindmost horse, with a thrilling scream of pain, broke from Clark's guiding hand and rolled headlong back into the stream, with a bullet through his heart.

At the same instant the other horse sprung up to the level, and stood there trembling from the excitement of his escape.

"Quick!" cried Ivan. "Ambush behind the horse! And run for the pass!"

There was not a moment to lose. As the three fugitives hid their bodies behind the remaining horse there came another wild shower of bullets, which pattered harmlessly on the rock face in the rear.

Ivan caught the animal by the bridle and set him in rapid motion, the men running so as to keep partly protected behind his body.

They were not ten paces from the rock behind which opened the pass. A second more and they would be within its mouth. Had the pursuers emptied their weapons? No. There came a single flash, a sharp report. The unfortunate horse staggered, and fell in a crashing weight to the rocky surface, leaving the three fugitives revealed.

"On, for your lives!"

Three quick steps, and they had passed the rock. The mouth of the pass yawned before them.

Into its sheltering jaws they sprung, and ambushed themselves behind boulders that lay within, while a hoarse yell of triumph rolled back across the stream to their discomfited foes.

"We have lost our horses; but we have our legs. Follow us if you dare."

The pursuers were silent. They seemed spell-bound, with their eyes fixed intently on the stream. The fugitives anxiously looked for the cause of this threatening silence.

In a minute more it appeared. A bold rider had followed their example, and leaped his horse into the rushing river. He was borne near to the curving shore. For the moment it looked as if he would gain the land. If so, a dozen might follow.

But no! The utmost struggles of the brave horse were in vain. In an instant he was swept past the perilous point. The scream of dread of

norse and rider mingled with the excited cry from the observers, as the daring pair were swept on to what seemed certain death.

"Good for our side," yelled Ivan. "I pity the poor devil, but it is life or death now, and it was us or him. Nobody else will dare the passage. We are safe from that. Come on, gentlemen. But keep under cover. We are not safe from bullets yet."

Up the pass they crept, gliding from boulder to boulder, for a short distance, until they gained a shoulder of rock that effectually protected them from the spiteful bullets that pattered around them.

"What now?" asked Clark. "We are safe for the present."

"But not for long. They will have hill scouts on our track before night. We have lost our horses and must go on foot. I wish I knew these mountains."

"I do," cried Peter. "Follow me."

Up the sloping pass they went. It was so rock-strewn that horses would have been useless. It could only be scaled on foot. The loss of their horses was not the disaster it had seemed.

We cannot trace their steps in detail for the next few days. Over mountain after mountain, through pass after pass. Now along a wild stream, now over a level valley. Miles and miles northward without food and without a sight of human habitation. But no trace of pursuit appeared. If scouts were after them they had not struck their trail.

Several days of this toilsome and hungry travel. Cold winds, full of the breath of winter, blew through these mountains. A light snow, the herald of the coming season, added to their troubles. But Peter led on steadily in a north-westerly course.

At the end of three days of this difficult journey they came out on a snow-covered plain, at

the foot of the mountains where, to their delight, a group of rude huts appeared.

In front of them stood several men, unbrowned, well-built fellows, with the high cheek-bones of the Mongols, and deep-set, scowling eyes.

"Good," cried Peter. "They are Vogals. They are the hunters of the North. We are out of Russian reach at last. And we can snap our fingers at the emperor and his minions. His strongest writ is only waste paper among these bold savages."

The much-needed food was readily obtained from their new hosts, whom Peter soon made friends with by knowing some words of their language. And it was not long ere they were being conveyed in a reindeer sled, over the snows which here lay deep, far North beyond the utmost grasp of the Russian laws.

As to Clark's after adventures, and how he finally got safely on shipboard, *en route* for America, the story is too long to tell here. But it was with heartfelt satisfaction that he grasped Ivan's grateful hand, and declared:

"We are quits now, my royal fellow. Life for life, that is my motto. You saved mine. I have repaid by saving yours. And now, if you want to breathe a free breath again, you had better come to America with me. There you will have no emperors to plot against, for yourself and every man you meet is an emperor on American soil. What say you?"

"I am with you to the death."

"And you, Peter? I can't leave you behind."

"America for me. It is hard to leave my native land. But freedom is better than one's country, and if all Americans are like you, Mr. Clark, I would give my head to tread on the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave."

And so we leave them, future citizens of the great land beyond the seas.

THE END.

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